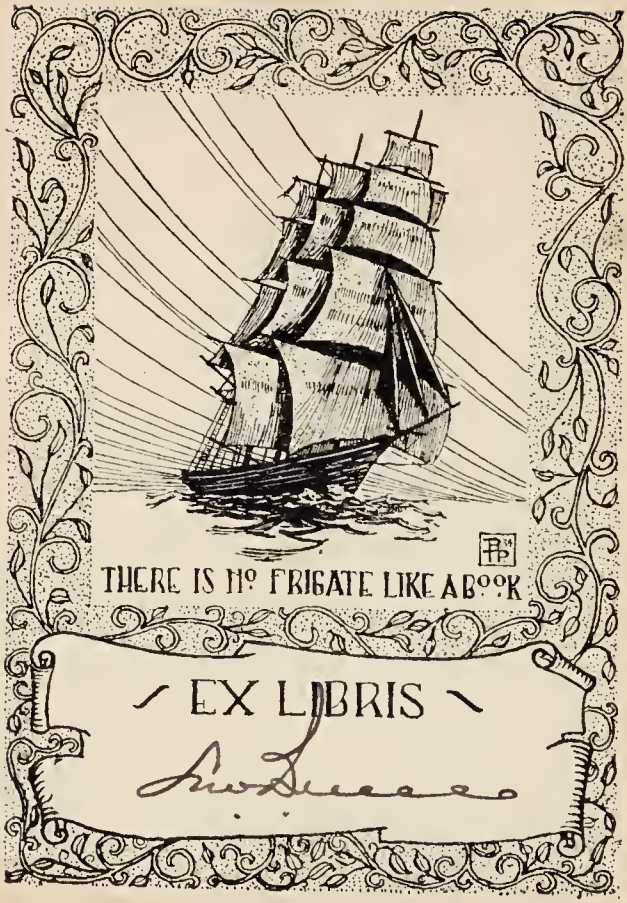
THE YOKE OF LIFE

FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE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THE YOKE OF LIFE

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BY

FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

TORONTO: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF
CANADA LIMITED, AT ST. MARTIN'S HOUSE

1930

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PART I. BOYHOOD

"Ah, que le monde est grand à la
clarté des lampes!"

Chapter I

THE HOUSE

In front of a white and diminutive but well-built cottage in the "bush" a small boy sat on the bare back of an enormous plow-horse. His span, from knee to knee, was just sufficient to straddle the beast. He was thin-faced and thin-limbed, bare-headed and barefooted; his light, uncombed hair, sticking up stiffly and irregularly in all directions, was bleached by the sun in a strange gradation of almost contrasting colours, from a dull ash-blond to a sheeny white; his legs were tanned to a greyish brown, a colour which testified to a hardening process brought about by exposure not only to light and heat, but to wind, rain, and cold as well. In one hand he held the halter-line with which he had been guiding his horse. From his mere size one would have judged his age to be ten or eleven; but the expression of his face betrayed him to be at least three or four years older than that.

From out of the porch of the little cottage—a screened porch, hung with striped awnings which moved lazily in the evening breeze—a strangely melodious and cultivated voice issued forth. It seemed strange, of course, only by reason of the contrast in which it as well as the cottage stood to the surrounding wilderness in which the charred

stumps of burnt trees were the most prominent feature.

"Well," that voice said, "if there is any one within thirty miles whose word I should take on a matter of this kind, Len, it is you. Yet I can only say that I must see with my own eyes before I believe. Should you recognise the bird if you saw a good picture?"

"I think so," replied the boy with a lisp.

"Come in for a moment. It won't take more than a minute. Those cows of yours went south. I saw them. Towards the old Lund place, along the dam. You'll catch them."

At the first word of invitation, the boy had slipped off the back of the horse as a grown person might slip off a hay-stack. He tied the beast to the stump of a tree and entered the porch.

There, a figure of medium height had risen. The boy confronted the owner of the voice, a bearded man considerably over middle age, clad in loose-fitting, somewhat shabby clothes. Within easy reach of a deck chair books were lying about on the floor and, balanced, on the narrow ledge of the balustrade which surrounded the porch. As the man moved, he did so with a pronounced limp: he had a club-foot. This was Mr. John Adam Crawford, principal of Balfour High School and a noted ornithologist who had built himself a modest summer home in this wilderness.

The door in the rear of the little porch led into a diminutive kitchen whence Mr. Crawford turned to the left into a room no larger than the porch the

walls of which were covered from floor to ceiling with home-made book-shelves. A large, flat-topped desk occupied its centre; and an oaken arm-chair and a wicker lounge completed its furniture. Beyond, facing the front of the cottage, there was a small bed-room with its door standing open.

Mr. Crawford reached up to one of the shelves for a book. Turning its pages, he held it at the level of the boy's eyes and pointed to the picture of an American magpie.

"Yes," the boy said with conviction. "That's it."

"Very well," Mr. Crawford said, dubiously. "I have never seen the bird within sixty miles of this longitude. I should get a horse, I suppose. The trouble is, my holidays will be over in a week."

"You'll go away again?"

"Yes."

"I wish you could be our teacher."

"So do I, Len. So do I. It can't be done."

"The school where you teach is much larger, isn't it?"

"It's a high school," Mr. Crawford said with a sigh. "But perhaps in a few years. . . ."

"You wouldn't care to teach in a country school, would you?"

"It isn't that, Len. On the contrary, I should like it better than what I am doing. I think the work more important, too. You don't understand. It's a question of salary. You see, I have children, too."

"Have you?" the boy asked shyly.

"Yes, two boys. They are nearly grown-up.

They are at college. When they finish there, I might be able to do what I should like to do; and that is to teach boys like yourself."

"Our school is going to be nice, I think. The carpenter says it will be finished by the first of October."

"Will it? And have you a teacher yet?"

"I don't know. The Department is going to send one out, they say. Whatever that may mean."

"Well, you want to get busy, Len. How old are you now?"

"I'm fourteen."

"You will have to work hard to catch up. You are seven or eight years behind."

"Yes," Len said dreamily. "I'll work hard all right. . . ."

"But?" the man encouraged kindly.

"I don't know whether I'll get much of a chance."

There was a moment's pause. The man looked down on the boy with an expression of infinite sympathy. He knew the conditions in pioneer settlements of the bush where the labour of women and children was not only an asset but an indispensable necessity; for, while the father created future wealth by clearing the land, the rest of the family had to make the living by selling butter and eggs, produced under circumstances which made mere trifles into hard tasks demanding patience and endurance worthy of better rewards.

The boy had drawn one of his feet up and was rubbing, with it, the mosquito and fly-punctured

calf of the other leg. One of his hands was resting on the corner of the desk. His body was going through curious, almost writhing contortions. It seemed he had a question to ask.

Mr. Crawford, wishing to help him, half divined what was in his mind. "You would like to learn a great deal, would you not, Len?"

"Yes," the boy said, looking up into the man's face, with a side-way motion of his own thin but well-shaped head. "Would a teacher in our school take up more advanced work at all?"

"That would depend on who the teacher is."

"Would you?"

"Yes, if I saw any need for it."

"I'm afraid," the boy went on, "I shall have to stay at home next year. I've heard my stepfather say the law doesn't require him to send me."

"I see." Mr. Crawford nodded. "What should you like to do with yourself when you grow up, Len?"

"I don't know," the boy replied, much embarrassed. "I think I should like to be a teacher myself."

"Well," Mr. Crawford said slowly, "you'd have a long tedious task ahead."

"I suppose. . . . You have two sons at college, you said?"

"Yes."

"What do they learn at college?"

Mr. Crawford gave a short laugh. "Not much," he said. "They might learn many things. All that

the great men of the past have thought and written."

"About the world and other countries; and about God?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to do that. What is a great man?"

"One who has thought and known more and more deeply than others."

"So that he can make inventions?"

"That, too. Though the greatest hardly do that."

"What do they do?"

"They explore the human heart and mind and help other men to understand themselves."

The boy sighed. Suddenly his dreamy expression dropped from him. "Well," he said, "I must go. Father went to McDougall; I must get the cows in before he gets home. Otherwise there will be a scolding."

"I hope," Mr. Crawford said, "there would not be anything worse."

The boy laughed in an embarrassed way, stopping at the door. "There might," he said.

"Well," Mr. Crawford said comfortingly, "we'll hope for the best. Good-by, Len. And if I should not see you again before I leave, good luck in school."

"Thanks," the boy said, and slipped out with remarkable speed.

Outside, he led his big horse alongside the charred stump to which he had tied it, found a

foothold on top, and scrambled on to the animal's back.

A minute later he was crossing a huge ditch running from north to south and bridged by a culvert. Beyond it, he turned on to a dam thrown up on the bank of the ditch which angled to the south-east; in spite of its narrow, round top, rough with rain-washed gullies, it showed by the ruts cut into its marly clay that it was used as a road.

The sun had meanwhile sunk towards the west, beyond a gravelly ridge with a low, grassy slough behind it and, at the horizon, the dense, dark forest of poplars.

To the east of the dam, a dismal, alkaline swamp stretched low, green in places, with sedges, dock, and flags; the rest of its sunk expanse showing dark-brown muck with whitish incrustations.

Farther south, the dam angled across this swampy slough which turned to the south-west, widening out where the gravel ridge ran its headland into it like the spur of a cape. Thence, southward, the dam skirted the bush that swept east to the very shores of the Lake which, to the boy, was as distant and wonderful as fairyland.

At this point he crossed the ditch once more, by a culvert; for from now on the dam lay on its western bank.

To beguile the time, as his slow-trotting horse went south, the undersized boy began to move about on the vast back of his mount, striking attitudes which, to a spectator, would have looked silly.

At the same time, however, he kept a sharp look-out for the cows which he was supposed to find.

Twelve miles or so farther on there was a creek, Grassy Creek by name, to which cattle liked to migrate; for it was the only spot within reach of a day's tramp where they could immerse themselves in water without getting caught in sucking mud underneath; everywhere else open water was underlain by swamp. So long as there had been no frost to kill the mosquitoes, cattle were always craving for water to cool their feverish skins.

"I hope not," the boy said audibly. "I hope not!"—Meaning he hoped they had not gone as far as that.

But for mile after mile he went on and saw no sign of them. The sun had touched the horizon and was dipping behind it.

At last Len saw a huge spruce tree ahead, outtopping the poplars all around. It stood close to the road, guarding like a sentinel a homestead in the margin of the forest where once a family of Swedes had tried to wrest a home from the bush. Mr. Lund, half lame and half blind, had one day, many years ago, gone into bush or swamp and never been seen again. The rest of the family had moved away. Now, a Ukrainian settler lived there, doing well because he profited from the labour the Lunds had wasted on the place.

The landscape which, a few minutes ago, had still been a sombre green began to be redrawn by the rising dusk in grey and black. Len hurried his

mount on: in him was the dread of the dark which is common to all such children as people the landscape with the creations of their brain.

When he reached the clearing of the yard, however, just beyond the great spruce tree, he pulled his horse in. His heart was in his throat: the scene looked so bewitched in its utter stillness. Over the whole of the open space which lay like a niche in the woods, and reaching out into the swampy slough to his right, there was spread, like a ceiling, a thin layer of smoke, snow-white, but quite opaque and marvellously level. It arose from a smudge in the cow-lot over which a straight pillar of smoke stood in the air, motionless like a pillar of stone; it was only two or three inches in diameter and reached up to a height of twenty or thirty feet above the ground, eight or ten above the dam, and from that point spread out in a level sheet which floated like a lid over all the landscape.

The boy on the horse was sorely tempted to turn back and to flee. This was a witch's habitation in an enchanted forest!

Yet he hesitated. What would happen if he did not bring the cows? He had always brought them.

That moment, from the cow-lot in the clearing, a man's voice sounded up. "That you, Len?"

"Yes." The boy's voice sounded hoarse.

"Looking for your cows? They came along all right. I turned them back an hour ago. They're over west, behind the ridge."

"Thanks," said the boy, re-assured. "I better hurry."

This short colloquy with a voice which he recognised—he had not seen Mr. Philiptyuk though he had searched the cow-lot with his eyes—had restored his confidence in the sanity of things; it had even imparted a certain exuberance of spirits to him, so that he turned his horse and galloped away, whistling merrily to keep himself company.

When he had gone three or four miles, still staying on the dam, he came once more to the point where it first changed to the other side of the ditch and then angled into the slough which turned east, thence to sweep north and finally west again till it lost itself in the bush north-west of his home.

It was opposite this point that the huge gravel ridge on which Mr. Crawford's cottage was built ran out into the slough.

Len left the dam and turned west. He could still just make out his directions. The greys of the landscape had deepened; but they had not yet merged completely with the blacks. He looked over his shoulder. Yes, the first stars had sprung from out of the depth of the sky. There was nothing to worry about.

He rounded the spur of the ridge. He could not trot his horse here; for all about, like charred monuments, burnt stumps were sticking up, bristly, from the ground; and between them there was a dense entanglement of raspberry canes, dogwood, and young aspen saplings.

He reached the far side of the ridge before it was too late for him to see the stumps. Then he left the picking of the path entirely to his horse.

It was, however, so uncannily still that slowly the noises made by the horse began to take on an almost supernatural quality which once more made him hold his breath.

Then, suddenly, he saw a point of light ahead. It proceeded from a lamp burning in Mr. Crawford's cottage. It showed the direction.

He had hardly become reassured by its recognition when a new terror assailed him, making his heart miss a beat. Then it, too, was recognised for what it was; and, once recognised, it proclaimed that his worries were over. The terror arose from the fact that not many rods in front of him a cow lowed, suddenly, angrily, persistently; the sound contained a warning and a threat. That lowing he knew. It proceeded from Bessie, the lead cow, summoning her reluctant herd to follow her home.

"Hi-yah!" the boy sang out, swinging both arms, forgetful of the fact that the darkness made his gesture futile.

He stopped his horse; all about, great, lumbering beasts struggled to their feet, lifting their rumps from their recumbent positions. Slowly the whole herd gathered to a knot in front and began to move. Bessie ceased lowing; and the horse fell in line behind.

Like a caravan travelling through the night they proceeded north. Within half an hour the waning moon rose in the east, grinning over the landscape from the rim of the world. By her wan light Len recognised the east-west road which led past the

newly built cottage. Only a little over two miles now!

He edged over to the north in order to get the cows to follow the road and to prevent them from entering the bush beyond. When he passed the cottage, he saw a man's figure silhouetted against the light which fell from the open door of the kitchen into the half luminous tent of the porch.

"Hello!" Len sang out cheerfully.

"You found them, did you?" Mr. Crawford's voice came back. By contrast to the haunted night it sounded wonderfully friendly.

"Yes," he said. "No trouble at all. Mr. Philiptyuk had turned them for me."

"Fine. Well, good-night."

"Good-night."

A little further on, Len executed another manœuvre to make sure that the herd would turn north and file into the slough. Once there, they would follow the dry trail which skirted it, winding in and out over the burnt-over bush of the ridge and finally cutting through it to the northwest till it reached the road which led past the farm.

Every now and then one of the cows stopped and lowed for water, lifting its nose. Water they would find at home now, and they knew it; yet they were slow; and Len was hungry.

But their very stops in order to low brought an unexpected ally. The ground seemed suddenly to break into life with the barking of a dog. Rover had heard them; and though he never left the yard

for very long, he had come to meet his young master.

His barks were answered by the howls of a pack of wolves in the bush to the west. Len listened and recognised them as coyotes, not timber-wolves; no danger from them! The dog, racing about, drove the herd into a trot. Len did not like that; for he knew that the swinging udders of the running beasts would spill milk right and left; and if he happened to meet his stepfather on the grade, there would be sharp words. But what could he do? Let them run if they must!

A few minutes later his horse gripped the flank of the grade and bounded up. To the right, as he turned east, the light of the house shone cosily out into the night. This was a self-contained world, closed off from the rest of the universe.

In the now white lustre of the moon, the boy loomed high on his plow-horse as, in twos and threes, the cows filed across the pole culvert and into the open gate of the yard beyond the ditch. A moment later he followed them, slipped to the ground, and closed the gate.

A short run-way, fenced on both sides, led past the house to the back yard with the cow-lot in its north-east corner. Crazed with thirst, the herd enacted the nightly scene of pushing and shouldering each other around the trough in the centre of the yard.

The backdoor of the house had opened; and a boy smaller than Len had shot forth, running fast on bare feet to reach the pump first; and there he

was ineffectually working away, for his weight was insufficient to swing the handle of the pump through a large enough angle.

Behind him, in the luminous rectangle of the door, appeared the form of a fat woman of medium height, wiping her face with the corner of her apron. "Where were they, Len?" she asked.

"South of Mr. Crawford's, west of the ridge; but I didn't know. I went as far as Philiptyuk's, along the dam."

"Ya-ya-ya-yah!" the woman sighed, shaking her head. "Well, drink the cows; and then come in for supper."

The cows drank for half an hour; one by one they filed off into the lot; and when the last had gone, Len closed them up.

The boys ran a race to the house which Len magnanimously allowed his smaller brother to win.

The backdoor led into the kitchen which occupied an almost central position in the house. To the east, a stairway led up; to the west, a large living room opened from the far corner. The inside of the frame building remained unfinished; no lath and plaster, not even an inner boarding had ever been applied to the joists. A summer day's heat still lingered in the rooms, and the smell of sun-parched wood mingled with the odour of cooking.

In a high chair, near the hot stove on which steamed a pan of dish water, sat a baby.

"Father at home yet?" Len asked of Charlie in a whisper.

"No," Charlie answered; and, "tagging" his

brother, he ran into the living room where he jumped up on an extension couch the springs of which creaked under his feet.

Mrs. Kolm, the mother, had filled a plate with soggy potatoes over which she poured melted lard, brown with long frying. She made the impression of being dispirited to an uncommon degree.

Len sat down on an upended box, took the plate from her hand, reached for a spoon, and began to eat ravenously.

But he had not taken many bites before the rumbling of a wagon crossing the culvert sounded through the house. Len put his plate down on the table and rose.

"Eat your supper first," his mother said sharply, busying herself at the stove where she broke three eggs into the sizzling lard.

Len resumed his plate with a dubious look. Charlie dived from the living room into the stairway where he sat down on one of the steps.

A minute or so went by before the wagon stopped in the yard. A strong voice called impatiently, "Whoa, there!"

It was so still that the thud of the driver's feet could be heard as he jumped to the ground. Steps crossing the yard resounded as if going over a wooden floor.

The door flew open; and there entered a man who had to stoop in order to remain clear of the lintel. His shadow which, as the door closed, rose behind him against the wall made him appear still taller than he was. The breadth of his shoulders

was enormous; and above them stood a head in which the sockets of the eyes, in the light of the lamp which came from below, looked like dark caverns in which small, light-blue eyes flitted to and fro.

"Why isn't Len coming?" he asked sharply; his voice betrayed him to be a young man still, younger probably than his wife.

"The boy's got to eat supper first," the mother said defiantly.

"So?" the man growled. "Didn't get home till now, eh?"

"No. He had to go nearly to the creek to find the cows."

"That so?" This time the voice was less harsh, with a peculiar undertone almost of humour. Then, harshly again, "Well, hurry up. Get through and put the horses in."

Len who, during this skirmish, had allowed his eye to travel from one to the other, said, "Yes, father," and made a little more haste.

The man at the door reached for a chair, tested its strength by tilting it and pressing down with his hand on its back before using it as his seat. He removed his shoes and rose again.

"Where's Charlie?" he asked in his commanding way.

"Here," the little fellow said, showing his head around the partition between kitchen and stairway.

"Here?" the man repeated, almost roaring; for he needed to raise his voice only a very little in order to produce an intimidating effect.

"Here, father," Charlie corrected himself.

"That's better," said the man. "Run and get the parcels from the wagon. What you can't carry, you leave. If you drop anything, I'll drop you."

The boy shot past him and came to a stop at the door.

"Well," the man asked, "why don't you run?"

The boy was in a flurry. "I can't open the door. You are standing against it."

"Who's you?"

"Father, I mean."

"Once more, the whole thing."

"You are standing against it, father."

"All right." The giant stepped forward; the boy shot out.

Len had finished his supper. He looked for a crust of bread, carefully wiped his plate, and put it down, taking the crust along.

As he tried to slip out, the man spoke once more. "Turn the horses out when you've taken the harness off."

"Yes, father."

The woman raised the pan; and the eggs sizzled and crackled in the lard. Her husband stepped up to the baby, lifted it out of the chair, and raised it to his head. It reached for his nose. He laughed, tossed it, and put it down again. Then he went past his wife who paid no attention to him and entered the living room where he sat down in a rickety easy-chair hardly strong enough to carry his weight.

In the centre of this room stood a large kitchen

table one end of which was laid for his supper. Along the north wall stood the lounge; along the unbroken west wall, a sort of sideboard loaded with bric-a-brac, the remnants of a small bourgeois household of the better class. There were four straight-backed chairs, the cheapest that could be bought, and two easy-chairs, old, decrepit, the stuffing showing through the rents of the covers.

In a few minutes his wife brought his supper; whereupon he rose, sat down at the table, and ate in silence.

Meanwhile the boys—for Len helped Charlie before he attended to his own work—had taken a number of parcels into the kitchen; and Len had staggered in with a bag of flour on his back.

Next, Len unhitched the horses and led them into the stable where, by the light of a lantern, he took their harness off. In order to reach the back-bands, he had to use a big packing case to stand on while Charlie unbuckled the belly straps. With all the strength of his undersized body he took hold of the harness while Charlie led the horses out from under. Thus he repaid his brother for the help he had given in unloading the parcels. At last the weary beasts which had that day gone thirty-four miles were let out through the backdoor of the barn; and with a tremendous effort Len lifted the heavy harness to the huge wooden pegs provided for it.

Then came a bit of frolic. It consisted in backing the wagon against the fence of the yard. The ground being uneven, each wheel, in topping the

little hillocks, sent the vehicle this way or that; and the apparent wilfulness of the heavy wagon gave rise to a good deal of fun; for the boys admonished and scolded it like a living being. The task accomplished, work ended in a game of tag about the wheels.

Between the two brothers there was a difference in age of three years; but it did not show proportionately in their sizes; nor, just now, in any difference of maturity.

A few minutes later, however, the mother appeared in the lighted rectangle of the door, carrying three pails; and though Charlie continued to flit in and out between the wheels, tagging in the dark imaginary playmates and the excited dog, Len stopped at once, ran to meet his mother, and reached for one of her pails.

He and his mother went into the cow-lot, took a milking-stool each from the rail-fence, squatted down, and began to milk. The mother, having filled her pail first, took Len's to finish it; and Len carried hers to the house.

There, he had to move a chair behind the door alongside the separator which had previously been covered with rags but now stood resplendent, the only thing in the room which looked really clean. Climbing up on the chair, he emptied his brimful pail into the bowl and then returned to the cow-lot. He received the second pail from his mother and handed her the empty one. Thus, milking went on for another hour; and when it was finished, the

separator bowl held two pails; and three more were waiting on the floor to be emptied.

All the time Charlie had been standing by the rail-fence, not so much looking on, for in spite of the moonlight it was too dark to see far in this realm of shadows, as keeping close for company's sake. He had jumped about from foot to foot, imagining that he was "floe-running" in the ditch. Floe-running was the great game in the thaw-up: square cakes of ice were cut out with the axe, not quite large enough to support a boy, but sufficiently buoyant to offer his foot resistance when he was swiftly running over a string of them, stepping on each and springing for the next floe before the last one sank.

When milking was finished, all three went to the house, and Mrs. Kolm started the separator for Len. As soon as it was running, Len, standing on the chair, kept it at its even speed. Whenever that speed slackened or was exceeded, a warning bell began to ring; and when the bell rang too often, a man's huge figure appeared in the doorway, greatly dreaded. The mother watched the bowl and the two pails, refilling the former and replacing the latter whenever needed.

Charlie was keeping out of sight. It was past his bed-time; and there was no escape unless he remained unseen. He was sitting in the stairway again, enjoying himself with being awake. The baby had been put to bed while the boys were unhitching the horses.

Thus the hour-hand on the battered alarm clock

advanced to the figure eleven. In the living room, Mack Kolm had risen with a great stretching and yawning; he was tired and sleepy, for he had done a day's work, driving: not exactly hard work in the doing of it, but exhausting in its effects. Yet there remained one task which traditionally was reserved for him. In the stable, at the back of the yard, stood two little calves to be fed by hand; and in the pen east of it, there were ten or twelve little pigs that had gone hungry in expectation of that milk which was at last available for them.

So, while his wife prepared to wash the dishes, he entered the kitchen, put his shoes on again, and took two of the pails of skimmed milk while Len stood ready with the lantern to light him.

Man and boy had hardly left the house when the mother stepped into the opening of the stairway. Charlie, startled by her sudden appearance, jumped and scared her.

"Oh, mamma," he said, "I kept so still! I thought you'd never think of me if I kept quiet."

"Run along now," she said. "Before he comes in again."

"Night-night!" the boy called. "Are you going to bring me a light?"

"You don't need a light. The moon is shining."

"All right!" sang the child and ran upstairs.

The door opened, and Mack Kolm took the last of the milk. When he came back, Len followed him and deposited the lantern by the door. His mother was washing the dishes; he reached for a towel.

It was a quarter to twelve when this work was done.

"Go to bed now," Mrs. Kolm said, hanging the wet towel on a nail.

"Good-night, mother."

"Good-night."

Since the boys had grown too big to share the cot upstairs, Len slept on the couch in the living room. He sat down and began to undress. His mother brought him a pillow and a grey blanket. Mack Kolm looked on as if nothing concerned him.

At last Len said, "Good-night, father."

Mack slowly turned his head. He was sitting once more in the easy-chair, one leg thrown over its arm. "Sleep fast," he said. "We'll haul hay tomorrow from the meadow. I'll call you at five."

Mrs. Kolm stuck her head through the door. "Len isn't going to get up at five," she said with stolid defiance.

"We'll see about that," her husband replied indifferently. "I suppose I can wake the whole house if I set myself to it."

"He'll go to sleep again. Why do you pick on him?" She entered the room with a few of her better cups and saucers.

"Pick on him?" he repeated with a vast surprise in his voice. "Do you call it picking on him when I try to bring him up right? No child of mine is going to grow up a loafer."

"He isn't your child. He's mine." The woman's hands trembled as she rearranged the knick-knacks on the sideboard.

"You seem to be itching for a fight?"

"I am itching to blast you."

"That so? Well, I don't want to quarrel with you."

"You never do, do you?"

"No. But if you want to know whose word goes here, just say so." He rose.

For a moment the woman handled picture postcards, half broken cups, and dusty flower vases with nervous fingers.

"I'm waiting."

"Waiting for what?"

"For you to do or say something that doesn't suit." He waited in vain. "Len," he sang out once more. "I'll call you at five. You'll help your mother to milk; and at half past six you'll be ready to start for the meadow. Understand?"

"Yes, father."

Mack waited a moment longer, his face to the door. Then, slowly, he turned, with a sidelong glance at his wife.

She tossed her head; but she did not speak.

"All right," said Mack Kolm, again with that humorous undertone in his voice. Then, picking up the lamp, in an almost friendly way, "Come on, Anna. Time to go to bed, I guess."

Chapter II

SCHOOL

It was two and a half years later.

Through the enormous drifts of the frozen slough two horses were plunging, a sorrel and a bay, drawing a cutter which pitched and rolled in the snow like a boat in a sea. An ineffectual morning sun glared down on the waste created by the night's blizzard. The landscape—the drifts, the bare trees, and even the sky—looked ice-cold, windswept, and hostile. The absolute quiet of the atmosphere and the indifference of the sun intensified that impression, just as the song of a bird on a battle-field emphasizes its horrors.

In the cutter sat a bearded old man who, in picking his road, exerted himself as much as did the horses in travelling it. He wore an old fur coat, fur cap, and huge gauntlets of fur. His lower body was rolled up in a goat-skin robe.

As he neared the east-west grade, which the wind had swept bare of snow, he caught sight of two boys walking and sometimes running along to the west. Between them there was now a considerable difference in height.

The man in the cutter sang out, "Hoih-o! Len, wait!"

A few minutes later, having swung up on the

grade, he stopped and admitted the boys under his robe. Neither Len nor Charlie wore mitts; both were clad in "mackinaw" coats and, under them, in blue-denim overalls. Grey cotton caps were insufficient to protect their scalps against the piercing cold. Down the cheeks of the smaller boy tears were running, congealing on the way.

Len, in taking his seat beside Mr. Crawford, nodded shyly. Charlie gave no sign of recognition. Mr. Crawford, in clicking his tongue, reached with one hand under the robe and drew up a round-bellied hot-water bottle of crockery which he handed to the smaller boy.

"Put that between your knees," he said. "Hold your hands against it." Then he threw the robe over the child's head and shoulders, burying him out of sight.

The horses shot along; a warm stable awaited them at the end of their journey. At the next crossing of trails they waited for a little girl of possibly twelve who, clad in a thin gingham dress, but wrapped in a multitude of shawls and scarves which left only a narrow strip of eyes exposed, struggled valiantly through snow knee-deep and unbroken.

"Come on, Helen," Mr. Crawford called; and, bending forward, made sign for her to climb up on the seat behind his back.

Thus they went for another mile and came to a trail which debouched from the south. There, in the corner, almost hidden by the bush, lay a homestead consisting of three small log buildings.

The cutter stopped for a moment; and a line of

five scholars filed from a path through the brush which grew almost level with the grade. The first to come was a boy, six feet tall and perhaps sixteen years old; the next, a girl, thin and slender, nearest to the boy in age; behind her, two more boys and another girl, all diminishing in size like the pipes of an organ.

Somehow the smaller ones piled into the sleigh, two crouching down in front, stepping on the teacher's toes; one crawling in with Charlie under the robe. The oldest two stood with one foot on the runner, with the other on the draw-bar, hands on the dash-board.

Slowly the vehicle got under way again, first through the dense bush, smoothly enough; but where the grade swung up and drifts were flung across it, snow was thrown aloft by the horses' feet, now in the form of dust, now of slabs, according as the wind had piled it. Thus the last mile was covered; and the school appeared south of the road.

This was a pleasant building put up by the provincial government, highly up-to-date, with all its windows on one, the eastern side, and a fresh-air intake projecting from its wall like a blunt nose. At the north end an entrance hall jutted out, housing a cloak-room; and the whole was painted in a pleasing colour-scheme of cream and brown. It had only one drawback: it was built for looks, to enhance the prestige of some official in the capital; for, though wood was piled into the jacketed furnace as if it did not cost any labour to cut it, water would freeze on its floor at mid-day.

A moment after the school had appeared, the view opened, to the north, on a farm yard of a somewhat unusual kind in the pioneer bush. It was dominated by a two-story frame house painted pink. A large, frame-built barn stood straight behind it, unpainted, it is true, but so solidly put together that its very outside promised warmth and comfort behind its walls. Beyond the barn, a forty-acre field was cleared.

The newness of things almost made it appear as if this establishment had been transposed from somewhere else: it had not grown as the result of native conditions: it stood in the untamed wilderness without a background in time.

The horses went on till they reached a culvert bridging the ditch and leading into this yard. There, as they slowed down for the turn, first the big boy, then the girl dropped off their perches; and, as the driver brought the team to a stop, three more of the children emerged from the box of the cutter. These were the pupils from the last homestead: their parents, the Hausmans, were not on speaking terms with Mr. Jackson, owner of the farm beyond the ditch.

A few minutes later, when the sleigh had stopped in front of the barn, Len, Helen, and Charlie also emerged. Helen and Charlie ran into the open door which beckoned with the welcome warmth exhaled by six horses and as many cows. Len bent down and unhooked the traces while Mr. Crawford drew the lines through the bit-rings of the bridles.

That moment, from the background of the

roomy stable, the figure of an old, loose-jointed man appeared, handsome in the way of old age, with bushy eyebrows and a snow-white, hanging moustache. He was holding a pitch-fork in one of his hands.

"Well," he said to the teacher, "brought your usual load, eh?"

"Yes. Eight of them, two thirds of the bunch. If I could I'd get the rest of them, too. But I can't go two ways at a time."

"That's so," Mr. Jackson agreed, looking roguishly at the two smaller children in the barn. "Well, I hope these youngsters appreciate what you are doing for them."

"No more than anybody would do."

The horses were ready to be taken in. Mr. Jackson led the way. Len took the halter-shanks and turned into the first stall. Charlie was standing in the drive way and shaking his hands as if he were trying to throw the cold on the floor. His face was recovering its humorous twinkle.

"Well, Charlie," Mr. Jackson said, "have you learnt to count? One, three, eleven, two . . ."

"Nonsense," Charlie said laughing. "You want to fool me."

"I'll be dashed," Mr. Jackson said, half laughing himself. "That's the way they learnt me when I was a youngster. Do you know the best way to take the smart out of your fingers quick?"

"No, I don't."

"Hold them into the hide of a nine-year old mule. Now that's a nine-year old."

"But it ain't a mule!"

"Isn't it?" Mr. Jackson feigned surprised. "Well, now, I may be mistaken. I never had much eddication. I thought it were a mule."

"No, you didn't."

"Well, you know best. Can you read yet, Charlie?"

"A little."

"Well, well! I must get you to come and read to me from them new-fangled books you've got in school. Me and Mary are poor hands at reading. I went to school but one year when I was eleven. I've near forgotten all I ever knew."

"I don't suppose," Mr. Crawford said, joining the group, "you find it much of a loss at that."

"Can't say I do. When I read, I've got to have my finger on the word and to move my lips. Mary says it's a disgrace."

"Well," Mr. Crawford mused, standing on his sound leg and leaning against a stanchion between stalls, "as the world wags, we've got to cram information into the children's heads instead of making men and women out of them."

"You're saying something!" the old man agreed, shaking his head. "Sounds different from what the last teacher said. Slip of a girl with her bit of high-school eddication, coming in here and saying, 'These people are only half civilised!'—Tell you, sir. When a person needs to have his finger on the word and to move his lips when he reads, he ain't so apt to read trash. It takes a mighty good book to stand such reading."

"There is something in that, no doubt."

"I'll tell you, Mr. Crawford, I've looked into that library which the department of eddication sends out and makes us pay for whether we want it or not. It's a disgrace. That's what it is."

"You want to be charitable, Mr. Jackson. Government folk have enough to do holding on to their jobs."

"There's need to be charitable," the old farmer nodded. "Over in Europe they've rushed into war. What the Sam Blazes do they want war for? And here they do the next best thing and give these children a hand-picked library of high-toned books."

Mr. Crawford had drawn his watch and turned to go. "Well, children," he said, reaching for his cane. "We'd better go over to school. You'll give my ponies a bit of hay, Mr. Jackson?"

"I will, sir," the old man replied.

Half an hour later the work in the little school was in full swing. There were only twelve children; but apart from the beginners' class which comprised six scholars, there were as many grades as pupils. Class-teaching was impossible.

Len who sat by himself was wrestling at almost the same time with the mechanical difficulties of reading and writing and such abstruse subjects as the principles of geometry and advanced arithmetic. While his reasoning powers flew ahead to explore the limits of the human mind in the conceptions of space and time, he was still troubled with the technical stumbling blocks of the mere arts. He was a poor writer and felt ashamed of it; when reading, he was

always tempted to grasp at the meaning of a sentence as a whole, instead of spelling it out word for word. Consequently, he was subject to attacks of despondency alternating with spells of exaltation. For the first time since he had gone to school—during the first year five teachers had followed each other; the next year he had stayed at home—he felt that he was getting sympathy and real help. He worshipped Mr. Crawford as a dog worships his master. Charlie excelled him in the elementary things; Charlie was always showing up well. He was receiving good teaching at an age when it was most needed. But, though Mr. Crawford never praised Len in the class and, on trifling occasions, was rather severer with him than with others, Len knew with that certainty which comes only from revelation or intuition that this teacher had consented to take this school for his sake alone. Why that should be, he could not tell; but he knew that it was so. Len was sixteen years old; his stepfather did not need to send him to school any longer; it was Mr. Crawford who had induced him to do so; and Len was grateful. Ever since he had first realised his power to assimilate knowledge, a new ideal had sprung up in him, dimly realised, till at last it had taken shape.

One day he was going to master all human knowledge in all its branches. Whatever any great thinker or poet or scientist had thought and discovered, he was going to make his own. If only Mr. Crawford continued to teach in this little school, he

felt sure of his help. He could hardly know as yet how comprehensive his ambition was.

Throughout the first morning period he worked at fever heat, solving problems, first in arithmetic, then in geometry. He sat alone in a seat of the easternmost aisle, next to the windows.

The central aisle was taken up by the three lower grades comprising all but two pupils. The western aisle, like the eastern one, held one child, Lydia Hausman, of nearly Len's age.

As Len squirmed in his seat, drawing one leg up and sitting on it, pulling his hair, grinding his teeth, and shaking his head in his absorption—all which manœuvres seemed to facilitate thinking—he was now and then aware that Lydia who had finished her assignment in formal arithmetic of the fourth grade and was studying her reading lesson looked his way and smiled to herself. He found this attention which she gave him very disturbing and, with his lips moving in unison with his thought, he turned to the window, looking up into the sky and fidgeting because even then he felt her look on the back of his head. Though, in that position, the upper and more mobile strata of his mind continued to grope along the lines and angles of his conceptions, the lower strata remained pervaded with a feeling of discomfort produced by the consciousness that the girl, in her own hidden thoughts, was making fun of his dogged endeavours. At last, frowning with absent anger, he turned and stared at her, trying to purchase peace for his work by sacrificing a minute or so to the open warfare of contemptuous

looks. But that made matters worse; for, though she averted her eyes as soon as his met hers squarely, a slow blush spread over her face, from her throat upwards; and in spite of her freckled nose she was pretty, with that slightly unhealthy prettiness which overwork and consequent anæmia often produce in girls of the pioneer districts. For reasons unknown to him, this distracted his mind to such an extent that he fidgeted more than ever and lost the thread of his thought.

Just then Mr. Crawford stopped by the side of a seat in the central aisle and began to speak.

"You don't mean to say that that is the best you can do, Henry? You will write that over again. If you can't finish it to my satisfaction within fifteen minutes, you will lose your recess and stay in."

The boy to whom these words were addressed was Henry Kugler, like most of the children, of Russo-German descent. Next to Len, he was the oldest scholar; unlike Len, he had been going to school for many years, for his father, before taking up his homestead in the bush, had worked in the city. There, in a city school, the boy had been promoted into the fourth grade, chiefly, as Mr. Crawford explained, for reasons of accommodation, whole classes being moved up in order to make room for those that followed. The successive teachers of Macdonald School had not cared to make any change in a grading sanctioned by city authorities. But Mr. Crawford, on taking charge, had put him back into the third grade, saying that he would be promoted as soon as he was able to do the work

required of him. From rebellion and ill-will, the boy had ever since done his work, not as well as he could, but as badly as he dared; and at home his parents had upheld him in his insurgency.

Scowling and muttering to himself, he set to work again, copying out the exercise which he had just finished.

Len, at the master's voice, had turned and was looking at Henry.

Seeing his glance, Mr. Crawford came limping to his side.

"What is it, Len?" he asked sternly.

"I'm all tangled up," Len answered, squirming.

"Let me see your figure. That is right. Have you tried to use your congruencies?"

"Yes, but . . ."

He did not proceed; for with a long, slender finger Mr. Crawford pointed to the sides of two triangles, grouping them into pairs.

"I've got it," Len exclaimed and smiled an embarrassed smile at the man by his side; and at once he bent over his exercise and began to write in his hieroglyphic scrawls.

Mr. Crawford left him and returned to the central aisle.

Fifteen minutes later, the teacher stepped to the front of the class. "Put your books away," he said; and, having waited a moment, ". . . Tention! Turn! Stand!"

The class went through the accustomed movements.

"Turn! March!"

The class was dismissed. As far as the cloak-room they went in good order; but beyond the class-room door the usual pushing and shuffling began as everybody tried to be first to get his wraps.

Then, crowding through the open door, they rushed into the yard which was buried under fresh snow. Led by Ernest Hausman, the smaller children began at once to play a game of hare and hounds, attended with much laughter and shouting. The older ones gathered behind the south end of the building where even in a wind there was shelter.

Henry Kugler, thick-set and burly, swore under his breath.

Willy Hausman, the biggest boy in school, tall, lank, strong, and good-natured by reason of his physical superiority, hearing him, gave him a push and teased, "You were in a hurry all right!"

"That's all he can do," Henry replied contemptuously, throwing his back against the building. "He can't teach me anything! He doesn't know enough himself. So he makes me copy over what I have done. The sneak! He can't say the work is wrong. Whether it's right or not, he can't tell!"

"Don't talk such nonsense!" Len said, blushing.

"Don't tell me what to say, you baby!"

"He knows more than any teacher we've ever had!" Len asserted stoutly, leaning against the corner of the school-house.

"Bosh!" Henry cried. "You should go to school in the city!"

"He's been a high-school teacher all his life!"

"Why does he come to a rotten little place like this, then? If he has, they probably fired him."

"That's a lie!" Len had turned white with anger.

"T. P.! T. P.! T. P.!" Henry mocked.

This appellation, "teacher's pet," introduced into the vocabulary of Macdonald School by the very boy who uttered it, was the worst insult that could be offered to any scholar. It implied that he to whom it was addressed "curried favour" with the teacher or "catered" to him, betraying the interests of his natural allies, his fellow-pupils. It provoked Len's anger, however, not so much on his own account as because it threw an aspersion on the master's impartiality.

Henry, though a year or so younger, was stronger and heavier than Len; yet the latter's fist shot out instantly; and in a moment the two boys were entangled in a coil on the snow, hitting each other, rolling over, kicking. The four or five scholars present formed an excited circle about the combatants. Only Willy Hausman slipped around the corner and ran for the door. He knew from experience that it was best to let the teacher settle such affairs.

But by the time Mr. Crawford came limping along, the fight was decided. Len had been worsted. His nose was dripping blood, and one of his eyes was closing up.

"Well," Mr. Crawford said; and it was strange that he could speak so grimly, "you know the rules. You will hold your hands up. Fighting's the one

thing we've got a strap for in this school. Who began it?"

"I did," Len said under the condemnatory silence of the standers-by who deserted his cause as soon as it was apparent that he, like the rest, would have to bow to the law.

"Very well," Mr. Crawford went on. "You will take the double tale. Go and wash the blood off your face before you report. You," turning to Henry, "take your seat meanwhile." And he wheeled about and returned to the school-room, followed by Henry who aped his walk.

Len had already applied snow to his nose and stopped the flow of blood. Then, still excited from the fight, he went to the front and entered the cloak-room where wash-basin and water pitcher stood on a little shelf.

Much to his annoyance, Lydia Hausman entered behind him and stopped by his side, her face pale and her eyes wide. When he straightened, he questioned her with an angry look.

"I didn't think you would fight," she said, her voice apologetic.

Len snorted contemptuously.

"There's still some blood," she said. "Let me wipe it." And she reached for a paper towel, dipped it in water, and wiped his cheek.

This brought her close to Len who was smaller than she. By some revelation he suddenly knew that she was pretty. As, with his eyes half closed, his look rested on her bosom, he saw, with a feeling new in his experience, that the edge of her dress be-

low the throat rose and fell with her breath. She, by some influence born from proximity, became conscious of his look and blushed; and he, stepping back and looking into her face, reddened seeing it. He turned and entered the class-room with that strange feeling which may have stood between Adam and Eve when the serpent had whispered his message. *"Eritis sicut Deus scientes bonum et malum."*

Len was glad when he had taken his punishment; the momentary sting in his hands filled him with a sort of moral exaltation. Henry received his share with stolid indifference.

The class reassembled; and Mr. Crawford heard the junior grades read.

During these exercises Len followed the lessons; for, though he was fully able to read a book beyond his years and to gather the meaning from the page, he stumbled over syllables and words whenever he was to read aloud and at sight; just as in writing he could put together a really good composition provided the reader was willing to overlook the many mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure; yet grammar, a reasoning subject, was one of his strongest points. When his turn came, he was merely asked to read a dozen lines of Evangeline which he had carefully prepared and to retell in a few words the contents of four pages of Tom Brown's School Days which had been assigned for cursory reading. He acquitted himself reasonably well; but Mr. Crawford merely nodded in silence as he stopped.

Dinner recess came.

Having dismissed the class, Mr. Crawford remained in the room till the children had eaten their lunch. He insisted on paper towels being used as table-cloths. Then everybody was turned out; and he himself went across the road to the house where Mary Jackson had prepared his dinner. Mary was a small, nervous old maid with a fine, pinched face and quick movements. She greeted the teacher with a friendly smile.

"Well," she asked, "did everything run smoothly today?"

"Not altogether," Mr. Crawford replied, sitting down at the table. "I had to use the strap."

"Is that so?"

"Thus a man makes rules for the conduct of others and gets entangled himself."

Mary laughed a low, gliding laugh. She did not quite understand; but it was easy to see that she more than admired Mr. Crawford. The shy, flitting glances of her eyes, averted forthwith, betrayed something little short of worship and adoration.

Old Mr. Jackson, her father, stood in the door. He threw up his hands and wagged his head. "I once served on a jury," he said. "When I lived in the city, that was. We had a case. . . . Well, I don't remember the details. Every one of the jurors agreed that he'd have done the same as the prisoner. But we had to find him guilty, and he went to the gallows."

Mr. Crawford nodded. "But it troubled you, didn't it?"

"It did," Mr. Jackson agreed.

"All law is unintelligent. It is no respecter of persons. But the person is after all the only thing that should be respected. When I came to this school last fall, small as it is, it was a perfect hornets' nest of spite and fight. I laid down the rule that whoever was caught fighting should get the strap. I don't believe in the strap."

"You are wrong! You are wrong!" Mr. Jackson wagged.

"Well, we don't see it that way nowadays. I don't say we get better results. On the whole, the growing generation is too soft."

"Go into the towns to see it!"

"Father," Mary said, stopping in her tripping run with a cup in her hand, "you forget that Mr. Crawford knows the town perhaps better than you."

"That is why I left it," Mr. Crawford said with a look at Mary. "When I was a child, in Ontario, we boys had ambition. My own ambition was no less than one day to leave the impress of my mind upon the age."

"Money and amusement," Mr. Jackson crowed. "Those are the only ambitions our youngsters have."

"In city and town," Mr. Crawford agreed. "And, of course, to a certain extent even in the country. But now and then you find even today a boy or a girl who has ideals. Perhaps ideals is not the word. It is something deeper than that. I have a case in point. There is a deep, instinctive urgency

in the boy, a striving after the highest to which he can never give scope without an education; but it was there before he had ever looked into a school."

"You are speaking of Len," Mary said with her gliding smile.

"Yes. For a western child he is remarkable. He is a genius in his way. All he needs is an opportunity. He has the fire. It was he who got the strap today."

"Won't hurt him," Mr. Jackson said grimly. "It'll take a little of the froth out'n him."

"I wish I could put a little more of the froth into him rather."

"And Len was fighting?" Mary asked, drawing her hands along her forearms in a nervous motion.

"He and Henry. I don't know what it was about. Len confessed to having begun it."

"I believe," Mary said, standing by the table, "I can explain that. There is only one thing Len would fight about; and that is your good name. The Kuglers have been going about for weeks, talking. Their theory is that you know less than their boy."

"Is that so?" Mr. Crawford smiled up at her, stroking his beard.

"We all know, of course," Mary added quickly, "what a sacrifice you made in coming here. And it's appreciated, Mr. Crawford."

"I don't worry. But don't speak of sacrifice. I consider it a privilege to help a boy like Len; or Charlie, for that matter; though as a scholar he is not what his brother is. As for the money . . .

I've lived frugally for forty years. My own boys have enlisted."

"Have you heard from them?"

"They are still in camp."

"They have made the offer. You have reason to be proud."

Mr. Crawford shrugged his shoulders. "There are many sides to that question. In a crisis, it is easy to offer one's life; especially when the chances are that you will not be killed. I fear the excitement of war was a welcome relief from the tedious, hard exactions of peace."

"Well," Mr. Jackson said, "my two good-for-nothing boys enlisted because they had never made so much money with so little work."

"Father!" Mary exclaimed uncomfortably. "You should not say that!"

Mr. Crawford reached for his cane and rose. "The test will come when the war is over. I suppose Len has looked after my ponies?"

The afternoon wore on with its round of grammar, history, geography, and singing; and school was dismissed.

Again eight children piled into Mr. Crawford's cutter; and as he drove along, he dropped them till only Len and Charlie remained.

"Many chores to do in winter?" he asked of the boy by his side.

"No. I have to get wood and water and to milk some cows."

"Time to read at night?"

"Some."

"What are you going to do with yourself later on?"

"I don't know. I shall farm, I suppose."

"Is that what you would like to do?"

"I like the farm. What else could I do?"

"Well," Mr. Crawford proceeded. "I have been wanting to speak to you about this. You said once you would like to teach. If you could attend school for another year, you could pass your Entrance examination. After that, in another two years, you could finish high school. A few months' attendance at Normal would give you a certificate. There are few doctors, lawyers, and ministers in this country who have not been teachers at some time of their lives. You would have leisure to study and a chance to save money to go to college. Teaching may be a stepping-stone towards other things. Not that I think little of the farmer. The farmer who has an education is more nearly a complete man than anyone else. But have you the body, the physical strength?"

Len looked dreamily ahead. "It is hard work."

"What a man does to make a living, matters little. It matters much what his influence is in life. I have that," and Mr. Crawford moved his clubfoot. "So I became a teacher and worked up in that line. Not because I wanted to make more money; but because I hungered and thirsted after a higher and truer idea of life. That hunger and thirst itself is happiness, Len. We shall never still it. We shall never find truth. But we must strive after it

without standing still. You have the spark. I wish I could fan it into a flame."

Len's eyes gleamed and glittered. All the muscles in his shivering body tightened with the exaltation of his mind. His vision took the shape of a glorious sunrise, the only kind of glory which he knew. He felt as if he were wrapped in solitude; the words of the man by his side were coming from a great distance. Len was in the presence of revelation; and what was revealed to him was the majesty of his self. Thus, Len's teacher asked forgiveness of a boy he had punished.

Chapter III

A VIEW OF THE FIELDS

ONCE more eighteen months had gone by. It was summer when, one morning about nine o'clock, Mr. Crawford's buggy drove into Kolm's yard and through the pole-gate, beyond, into the bush that surrounded the fields. Within a few minutes he reached the clearing where wheat stood five inches high: a good, even stand on cleared land, ten or fifteen acres of it, running north and south.

To the west, there was a newly-cleared strip freshly broken where four people were at work, a man, a woman, and two boys. At the edge, a baby sat on a blanket, propped up with pillows which lacked their slips. Near the northern end, where the man and one of the boys were working, stood a wagon hitched with two horses.

Mr. Crawford alighted and tied his drivers to a tree.

Kolm who had seen him went on with his work; and everybody took his clue from him. Like the rest, he was barefooted; but his head was covered with a cotton cap. His enormous chest showed its hairy skin, for the faded blue shirt, much patched on elbows and shoulder-blades, was open in front. His legs were encased in soiled and torn black-denim trousers.

Len who, in the meantime, had grown extraordinarily, as if he were going to make up for past neglect, looked all too slender; both he and Charlie were similarly attired. But Charlie, in spite of his smaller size, looked healthier, more resistant and robust than his brother. Len struggled with the stones which he lifted into the wagon-box, straining every muscle with the effort of desperation; Charlie pulled at the roots which he helped his mother to pile as a boy playing football calls to his aid every ounce of endeavour of which he is capable.

The woman wore a shawl over her head. She was ghastly pale. Her gingham dress was hanging unevenly about her bare legs. She had not seen the man who was approaching; and when he greeted her, she stopped, startled, and dropped her root. As if to suppress the sudden pounding of her heart by outward pressure, she raised a hand to her breast.

"You scared me," she said with a wan smile on her yellow face.

"I'm sorry," Mr. Crawford said, passing on with a nod.

Charlie sang out a pleasant "Hello!" But, without stopping, he pulled at his root with all his might, as though he were "showing off."

Next, Mr. Crawford passed Len who smiled as he lifted his thin face.

By this time Kolm who had been swinging his pick to loosen an enormous stone from the clinging soil had dropped his tool and was throwing the sweat off his forehead with a crooked finger of his

left. His right hand he was wiping along the leg of his trousers.

"How are you?" he asked, looking at the caller out of his small and honest but cavernous eyes.

Mr. Crawford stopped as he shook hands, standing on one leg and supporting himself by his cane. "Clearing?" he asked.

"Breaking," the giant corrected. "The clearing is done in winter."

"What will that bring you up to?"

"Twenty-three acres, more or less."

"A nice field; and bush soil. Hard to break and so on; but it gives the yield. What with present prices, you should do well."

Kolm laughed. "High prices cut both ways. The farmer who is established and has his equipment is making money. But we beginners. . . . If there were no debt!"

"Well, it seems, even a small farm like yours should easily carry a thousand or so . . ."

Again Kolm laughed. "Tell you," he said. "Put a debt of a thousand on a raw bush farm, and you might just as well put a rope around the farmer's neck. Look how we work. The whole family's slaving away. From dawn till dark. What for? We work for the Jew. And the lawyer. To stave off foreclosure. . . . Of course," he went on, flinging an arm, "we are getting there. A few more years, and a little good luck! Once out of debt, never in again! I wouldn't buy a cup on credit."

"You have learned your lesson? . . . Now, Mr. Kolm, I came to speak to you about certain things.

Do you mind if I see your wife and the boys before I do so?"

Kolm looked surprised; but he said readily enough, "Not at all. Go as far as you like."

During this short colloquy none of the other three members of the family had for a moment stopped work. All three had cast an occasional furtive glance on the group by the wagon, wondering what the men might be talking about. But even Charlie had gone on pulling up roots as if he were anxious to win a foreman's approval.

It was he to whom Mr. Crawford went first. "Well, you ride after the cows now, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," Charlie said with humorous mock alacrity.

"When do you get to bed at night?"

"Half past ten, eleven o'clock—if I find the cows right away."

"And if you don't?"

"It may be midnight before the milking's done."

"Do you find it hard to get up in the morning?"

The boy grinned roguishly.

"Bed feels good, eh?"

"You bet!" the boy replied with precocious emphasis.

Mr. Crawford passed on to the woman who lowered her eyes. Hers was not the bashfulness of a girl unused to being addressed by a stranger; rather that of a woman who has seen better days and is ashamed to be found in her poverty. She gave a flabby hand to the caller.

"You don't look well, Mrs. Kolm. This is heavy work."

"It's got to be done."

"Might I ask when you had your last child?"

A startled look came into the woman's eyes which evaded those of the man. Then she pointed to the margin of the field. "She's a little over a year old," she said.

"How many have you had altogether?"

"Five. Two are dead. And of course . . ." she added as if she were concealing something.

"Yes?"

"I've had several miscarriages since."

"When was the last?"

"Three days ago."

"You did not stay in bed very long?"

"In bed?" she repeated. The jaundiced colour of her face had given way to a glowing, unhealthy copper red. "It rained the next day; so I stayed at the house."

"But you did the housework and milked at night? . . . You have not always lived on the farm?"

"No. For the last ten years now." For a moment she stood silent. Then, as if a dam had been removed, "Yes. If only my first man had lived! He had a head on him. He could manage things. I never did any hard work. We had a hired man. It was he"—with a scarcely perceptible nod towards Kolm. "My first man built the house. If he had lived, it wouldn't be what it is. He was handy, you know. He could do all sorts of things. The stable,

too, he built. This man can't do a thing but work like a brute."

"Don't be unjust," Mr. Crawford interrupted her. "I understand he had to take over debt and encumbrances."

"Yes," she replied with a sudden abandon. "There was debt. You can't run a farm without debt. I was a fool to marry this man. What could they have done except take the farm. I'd have gone back to the city and hired out."

"Perhaps," Mr. Crawford said. "But once you are established, where is there a life that can compare in independence and security with that of the farmer?"

The woman laughed. "Why are you not farming yourself?"

Mr. Crawford touched his foot with his cane. "The reason is there."

A few minutes later Mr. Crawford returned to the place where he had first spoken to Kolm. Kolm had meanwhile driven his wagon to the edge of the clearing and was unloading a perch or so of stone. While the teacher waited for him to return, Charlie and his mother were kindling a pile of roots and brush. Soon it flamed up in the morning sun, disengaging a thick, acrid column of smoke which, at the height of the tree-tops in the bush, blew away to the south like a plume.

As the wagon returned, Mr. Crawford nodded to the giant. "Could I speak to you alone for a few minutes?" he asked with a look at Len.

"Go and help Charlie," Kolm said to the boy.

"Mr. Kolm," the teacher went on when the boy was out of ear-shot, "before I say anything else, I should like to explain my visit to you. Len has not been in school for over a year now. Once in a lifetime a teacher meets with a boy or a girl who convinces him that he is destined for the highest things if he is given a chance. Such a boy is Len. Not to give him the chance would be a crime if it were wilfully done. To give it would be the greatest service any man can do his country. That must explain why I am here. There is no other motive. Believe me, I am sincere."

Kolm cleared his throat. "I have no doubt about that."

"Mr. Kolm," the teacher went on, "you cannot but be aware of the fact that Len is not very strong."

Kolm laughed an embarrassed laugh and scratched his head.

"I don't mean only that he has no great muscular strength. But I understand that his father died of consumption. If you overwork the boy, he will go the same way."

"That so?" Kolm asked. "They say, it's hereditary."

"Not the disease. But the predisposition."

"And he's got that?"

"He is bound to have it."

"Well, now," Kolm said, "you are putting this thing up to me as if it were I who has to decide. I don't know that that's fair."

Mr. Crawford lifted himself to a sitting position in the rear of the wagon box.

"Do you know what I'm up against?" Kolm went on. "I married into this family, taking over the children and the debt. I did it because I saw that something had to be done for them. Some fools think I fell into a soft bed. That's nonsense. We are getting there, sure enough. But it takes every bit of the work of every one on the place. It will take years.

"How about other settlers here in the bush? There isn't one left out of every five that started. Where are they? They put in three, four years of their lives and then go back to the town to work for wages. New settlers come and take their places; and they, too, leave in their turn. It takes three, four settlers in succession before one can make it a go. Each profits from the labour the last one put in.

"Take Jackson. He bought his place; he had money, not made on the farm. There were forty acres cleared on the place when he took it over. He's the fourth to try his hand. The third one proved up. But the moment he did, he was lost because he owed money. Best thing for him, too. He could never have made a success. Hausman may pull through. He doesn't need to prove up till he's out of debt.

"How about the rest? Did you see the pile of lumber I've got in my yard? Do you know where it comes from? You've seen deserted clearings in the bush, with the remnants of buildings in ruins.

That's where the lumber comes from. It's rotting there in the shade. I might as well have it.

"Money? I never see money from one end of the year to the other. When I take wheat to town, I take the ticket over to the implement agent without cashing it. Glad if it pays the interest. Cream cheques? They go to the store. Cord wood? We get what we need in clothes.

"To run this place so as to owe a little less at the end of every year takes all the work and planning a man and a woman and two children can do. And unless we have luck, we cannot do that."

"Mr. Kolm," the teacher said, "suppose things take a little more time if you let Len go to school in winter. Three more years, and he could teach in this school and make money for you."

"Perhaps," the giant said stolidly. "If we could wait. But we can never wait. Last year we had two hundred bushels of potatoes to sell. They went up to a dollar or so in spring. We needed flour in the fall and got forty cents. The man who can wait for a higher price is the man who doesn't need it. What does it say in the Bible? To him that has shall be given. That's the law of the world.

"I leave it to you. Here I sit in the bush. I want to do the right thing. By the family and by the country. I can make this homestead a go; or I can make a teacher out of the boy. Take your choice."

"Put it this way," Mr. Crawford said mercilessly, "you can make the boy happy; and you can kill him."

Kolm shrugged his shoulders. "This wilderness,"

he said, "eats us up. They tell us before we come to this country that they will give us free land. They don't tell us that what they really want is our free labour in clearing it and making it fit for human beings to live in. I don't complain, you know. I am merely stating facts as I see them. When I married this woman, I knew what I was letting myself in for. I preferred it to going back into wage slavery over there. I still think I can make it a go. But I need the help of the boy and—the woman."

"Since you mention the woman. . . . I won't put it harshly. But a pregnant woman should not work in the field. And during the last month she should do nothing that could be called work."

"That so?" Kolm asked. "How about the rest of the women around?"

"Exactly. Whence this appalling mortality among the children? Miscarriages outnumber the normal births. If that is a law, it is no law of God's. How is it that your wife looks a woman of fifty? I don't suppose she is more than . . ."

"Thirty-five," Kolm replied, throwing up his hands. "Don't tell me it's my fault. If you do, I'll do something desperate."

"It's the fault of the circumstances. But perhaps, Mr. Kolm, you could do something to mitigate the harshness of it."

The giant looked from the man to the woman who worked in the distance. With a sudden movement, as of rage, he straightened and shouted across the field. "Anna!" he called. And, when the woman looked up, "Go home! Go home, I say! Do the

work at the house!" And, turning back to the caller whose look betrayed that the course of events rather frightened him, he added, "I don't want it said that I ruin the woman. As for the boy, if things go well this fall, I'll send him to school, in winter, when harvest is over."

Mr. Crawford sprang down from his seat. "Thanks," he said. "I know, Mr. Kolm, you are making a sacrifice; and I appreciate it."

The giant's movement was one of despair.

Chapter IV

NEW STIRRINGS

BUT things did not go well.

On the eighth of August the heat had been unbearable from early in the morning on, with the air so surcharged with moisture that the perspiration of the body did not evaporate, standing in beads on forehead and hands and causing acute discomfort. Such is the atmosphere before the grand spectacular events of summer on the prairies: tornado, thunderstorm, or hail.

Shortly after dinner there was an indefinable change. No wind sprang up; but the aspen leaves trembled as in the spasm of a sob.

Then, suddenly, things began to develop fast. Huge, vaulted clouds rose into the sky as if from nowhere. Quick little rushes of wind flitted this way and that; and there was a noticeable fall in temperature. A flash of lightning winked over the darkening landscape, followed by an unearthly silence.

Every manifestation of the powers above entered the vast, still dome of the sky as words spoken behind the wings enter a darkened stage. Yet this stage was not dark but rather lighted with a weird, incomprehensible radiance which made colours and details of form stand out with marvellous brilliance and distinctness and at an enormous distance. From

the correction line, where Mr. Crawford's cottage stood, an upland meadow in the Dusky Mountains to the west showed, under the lid of the clouds, like an emerald in the black velvet of the forest. It was over thirty miles away.

A seething, whitish festoon of cloud drew nearer from the northwest, rolling along like a cylindrical, revolving broom. Every now and then it was whitely illumined by a flash which was at last followed by nearer and nearer thunder.

Abruptly, then, with a fierce onslaught of wind which bent the young poplars everywhere to the breaking point, there was a drumming noise which rapidly increased in volume. Everywhere hail rebounded from the ground, from everything that offered resistance. The first hailstones melted as soon as they touched the heat-saturated soil where they had flattened the lowlier plants. Then, with the size of the stones increasing till they were as large as sparrows' eggs, they began to cover the ground. The leaves of the trees were first shredded, then torn off, and pounded into a pulp.

A white terror of light seemed to rend the world asunder and to stab every eye, followed by a fierce, rattling peal which made the hearer tremble by virtue of its diabolical significance.

Thus the hail continued to fall for half an hour, drumming down on all the landscape.

When it was over, ice lay four inches deep on the ground. The world seemed to stand in ruins. Everywhere the green screen of foliage was gone; once more the black, charred stumps stood out in

bold relief. The atmosphere was chilled as by the first snow-fall of a coming winter; yet there was the smell of crushed green things in the air.

Man ventured out to look at his losses.

A mile west of the school, Hausman and Willy, his oldest son, were standing on the bush road which led south and staring at what had been a wheat field.

Hausman, tall, slender, sallow, and pock-pitten, shrugged his shoulders and mumbled, "That's what was to put shoes on the children's feet; and clothes on the back of the woman. A man works and works till he's worn out. The crop grows fine. Wheat is two dollars. Hail wipes it out. Take a rope and go into the bush . . ."

Two and a half miles farther east, Kolm and Len were working, up to their knees in mud and water, to raise the sheep shed on to some stones. Dead chickens were lying about in the yard as if they had been killed by lightning. A cow lowed by the side of her calf which had been slain. The sheep bleated in a panic. In the house, not a pane of glass had been left whole.

Kolm, too, was talking, half to himself, half to Len. "That should make those bloodsuckers shake in their boots!" he said. "They are waiting to get their interest and a payment on capital account! Why don't they say, We've got a common stake in the country, you and I. You give the work; we give the tools; we shall share the profit and the loss! But the hail doesn't hit them. I lose all; they noth-

ing. They merely add the interest to the principal and have a better strangle-hold on me."

Len listened but did not stop in his work.

At night, in order to be alone for a moment and to surrender himself to his feelings, he went behind the barn and stood there, barefooted, shivering in the chill that seemed to breathe from the bush. A rebellious impulse made him assert that even now he would not acknowledge defeat: far countries he was going to see with his eyes: strange thoughts he was going to master with his mind: all the beauty there was in the world he was going to grasp with his soul! . . .

When his stepfather called, "Len, time to start milking!" he had to clear his throat before he could answer, "Yes, father, I'm coming."

A few weeks later, the Kolms were sitting in the living room of the house and entertaining a guest.

This guest was Mr. Joseph, a thick-set, broad-shouldered man of thirty-five or so, with small, blue eyes looking out into the world, half scared, half with a cunning alertness. The sparse hairs of his short, brown moustache seemed to grow in all directions at once. He wore a blue suit of old-country cut, built for a life-time. The cloth was so thick and heavy that the seams had never yet flattened out.

He had come along with the Kolms from Macdonald School where services had been conducted in the morning by the Lutheran pastor of Odensee, a small Russo-German village south-east of Macdonald.

Mr. Joseph was a recent settler who had "homesteaded" a quarter section in the bush three miles north-west of Kolm's place. The conversation was carried on in German.

"You walked?" Kolm exclaimed at a certain point in the conversation.

"Yes," Joseph replied. "It took a week. They have a government office in the city. They advised me to go to the bush in the winter. I don't know . . ." He shrugged his shoulders and looked from one to the other.

"And you walked home again?" Kolm's mind had clung to this one fact, amazing to him.

"Yea. They'd have given me a ticket if I had signed down. You get your transportation both ways. McDougall is halfway to Deer River; that's where the camp is, close to Elk Lake. But I don't want to be alone. It is bad enough here. I keep thinking of my family over there."

"Pretty bad," Kolm nodded. "Heard from them recently?"

"Not a word for over a year. The Russian mail goes through Germany."

"Yea," Kolm said. "And nothing comes through. How many children, did you say?"

"Six. And two are big boys by now. Eight or nine years old."

"What did you say they'll pay you there in the bush?"

"Thirty-five dollars a month and board. But I'm afraid to go so far alone."

"Len," Kolm called as if the boy had been far away and not sitting next to him in the same room.

"Yes, father?"

"How'd you like to go along with Joseph?"

"Might be all right."

"How'd he suit you?" Kolm asked his guest.

"Will they take him?" Joseph asked hesitatingly.

"Why not?"

"He's only eighteen. As far as I'm concerned, he'd be all right. He speaks English."

"Sure," Kolm said.

Joseph pondered. "I'll tell you," he said at last. "If Len promises to meet me at McDougall when I pass through, I'll go back to the city and see."

"What? Walk in again?"

"Sure. That's nothing."

"What do you say, Len?"

"All right," the boy replied.

"Six months at thirty-five dollars. That would pay the interest if nothing else."

"They might not pay him so much," Joseph suggested.

"Well, say at thirty!"

"I'll see," Joseph said.

"How about your wood?" Mrs. Kolm asked, looking up from where she had been sitting idle by the window.

"Well?" Kolm asked sharply; she was interfering in things which did not concern her.

"Who's going to haul it?" she asked ironically; she liked to disturb her husband's plans.

"Who? Who's there but Charlie?"

"Charlie? Charlie can't handle a team."

"Time he'd learn," Kolm replied undisturbedly.

This pleased Charlie greatly. He nudged Len with his elbow.

"Come on," he whispered. And the two boys slipped out.

There was no snow on the ground yet. It was the season of the Indian summer though the landscape, deprived, by the hail, of its veil of green, looked wintry and bare.

"Say," Charlie said, hopping and fidgeting as soon as they were in the yard. "I am going to haul. Did you hear?"

"Yes," Len said. "You won't like it so well after awhile."

"Pshaw! Why not?"

"It's cold in winter."

"I'll get mitts. And Bill Hausman is going to haul. I'll be going with him."

"Yes," Len said, "you can tie your horses behind his load."

"And sit with Bill!"

"You'll miss school."

"Doesn't matter!" Charlie said. "I'm nearly fifteen."

Whenever the boys were alone, they spoke English.

"You better go in," Len said callously. "I want to have a walk."

"I'll come along," Charlie begged, springing from the toes of one foot to those of the other and kicking his heels.

"No," Len said shortly, "you won't."

"You can't go without asking!" That was Charlie's revenge for Len's refusal of his company.

Len went abruptly into the house.

As he often did these days, he felt the need for solitude, for introspection, for an observation of his natural surroundings, undisturbed by any human presence.

Shortly after, he left the yard and crossed the road.

The warm, bronzed air of the fall lay over the bush. In its aisles Len lost himself. Vague things were astir in him: things which he could not have shared with another.

He was eighteen years old. His body had, during the last few years, gone through an astonishing development. Seen alone, he looked tall and sturdy. It was only when seen with other boys of his age, Willy Hausman, for instance, that he still looked undersized and flat of chest. Yet his features had remained thin, his nose peaked. His movements were awkward with the angularity of adolescence.

For awhile, as he threaded the bush at random, his thoughts remained articulate, concerned with the two men in the house. If he could have had his choice, he would have gone to school. But he knew that that could not be; and he had accepted the fact. It would be work in the bush. Heavy work. Well, he was not afraid of heavy work; at home or elsewhere, what did it matter? To go away and to see something of the world meant adventure. Distance had the glimmer of fairylands; travel, the

allurements of the ideal. Perfection was anywhere but at home. Even a trip to McDougall or Poplar Grove had about it something exotic. Poplar Grove was only three miles from the great Lake, and it had long been a dream of his to see that lake one day. In towns people lived a different life; more comfortable, more indolent. The peculiar kind of schooling he had gone through had made Len a dreamer of dreams. Vistas had opened into strange realms of the mind. He did not question their value; they lured him. Others had gone the mysterious paths of knowledge: how could he think but that for him, too, they were worth going?

Life stretched ahead: life at this stage of adolescence is something mysterious. There was much to do; there was also much time to do it in: years and years! What did it matter if he lost a winter?

Yes, he would go. He would travel into foreign parts and mingle with men from all over the country. He would sit at camp fires at night; he would listen to much that others had to tell.

These things flitted past his mind in half-discerned outlines: snatches of thought, feeling, perception. His whole being seemed to float in a sea of unknown things: the world was wide and infinite in his mind.

Having gone at random, swayed and dominated by an obscure reaching out of the impulses urging in him towards life, he found himself at the edge of the Big Slough. South, in the margin of the bush which seemed to curve away into infinity a small white spot appeared: Mr. Crawford's cottage. Len

realised with a pang that nothing drew him there. Mr. Crawford had done much for him in the past; no doubt he would do more for him in the future; but in the poignant present he had no place. Mr. Crawford represented mind, not soul; in Len it was the soul which was awaking.

He sat down on a log, feeling vaguely unhappy. A longing was in him, unrecognised as such: a first adumbration that a human being is, in mind and soul, imperfect by itself; that somewhere in this world it must find its complement. A half is seeking the other half which will complete it into a self-contained whole. The first wing-reaches of this awaking are always painful: they are never understood by the one who suffers from them. If they were, the purpose of life would be thwarted. They are the most delicate thing there is in human growth: more delicate in a boy than in a girl; and the most disastrous thing that can happen to the young, emerging soul is to have its mysterious stirrings coarsely explained.

Vaguely Len rose and went on. A strange, bittersweet unrest seemed to impel him.

Beyond the slough, the bush stood virgin, bare, mysterious: it was dead and living at the same time; for the trees, prematurely deprived of their leaves by the hail, were trying to repair the damage done. Buds that had been only half developed when the hail broke the protecting leaves had swollen with the pressure of the sap deflected into them, in order to put forth a new crop of belated leaves. The boy did not know this; his knowledge of nature was

not theoretic; it was pragmatic, taking the facts and interpreting them in terms of moods.

It was the first time that he experienced anything like this, a longing for a sympathy in nature. As, by the lack of a teacher's guidance, his mind had been delayed in applying its growth to the task of acquiring formal knowledge, thereby giving it a power to grasp which was hampered only by his incomplete mastery of mechanical details, thus his soul, too, had failed to find objects to expend its energies on till it had grown in strength and was now flooding even his physical consciousness.

The aspect of these woods with their irregular border-line along the slough—here receding and forming a bay, there jutting boldly forward into a bluff—seemed to give that repose; he went on.

His age, full of enigmatic developments concentrated into a few hours, saturated with what is commonly spread out over years of scarcely perceptible unfolding, was preëminently that of the mythic poets who project into nature the procreations of that awe in which they stand of themselves, in the forms of fabulous concrescences of incongruous parts which they harmonise into imaginable wholes.

Len had hardly entered the bush on the east side of the slough when he stood arrested. His heart was pounding so that he could hear its thud; he felt the tremour of its beat running through his frame. He stared straight ahead. Among the bare boles of the snow-white aspens, dead and yet alive, he seemed to discern a shape. It was a fabulous creature: the

body that of a large deer; the head almost that of a small but nobly-shaped horse, especially in its gesture of startled attention; and from its forehead there sprang a single horn, spirally wound or twisted, but perfectly straight, and ending in a fine point three feet above the head. The glassy and immovable eye of the creature seemed to have gathered in it the whole essence of shy, wild nature with which our northern woods surprise us. Even in summer these woods seem to be pervaded with a chilly, virgin atmosphere; slight shivers seem to run through them: such shivers as run through the wild horse of the prairie when it first feels the touch of bridle or rope.

In a moment the vision he had seen was gone; it had resolved itself into what he knew by the name of a jumping deer. Standing as it did among the small growth of young aspen boles, beyond a thicket of older trees, it had appeared, as to size, hugely exaggerated: the horn on its forehead was no more than the branch of one of the boles. But, as the picture which he had seen decomposed itself into its elements, Len felt sorry with that sadness which overcomes us when we see or hear a beautiful marvel rationally explained.

Two or three years ago he would have been thrilled by that rational explanation: then the most wonderful thing in his experience had been the awaking of the mind which found delight even in the multiplication table. Now he was ready to scorn and spurn the merely reasonable things. The unexplainable made its appeal: poetry, mystic signifi-

cance, religious symbolism. But, since he had not yet entered the realm of literature, his urge was denied its natural outlet.

He went on; and as he did so, the rational explanation of what he had seen fell away; the vision itself remained.

Again he sat down; there was no real thought in him; nothing proceeding from one definite point to another. His soul swayed to the slightest adumbration of things seen or heard. Sometimes, of an evening, when the air was almost breathless with stillness, the notes of an accordion would float over the bush, played somewhere in a new clearing by one who was alone as Len's soul. As he sat there in the bush, on a half-decayed tree trunk, absent-mindedly breaking fragments of bark and throwing them aimlessly on the ground, detached notes and bars seemed actually to reach his ear; he could not have told whether he heard them or merely imagined he did. With them, little bits of visions arose and flitted away again; persistent among them being one which might, to a more experienced eye, have revealed their origin. It was the sight of the edge of a dress on a slender, girlish bosom, rising, falling in the rhythm of a breath; it was followed by that of a blushing throat, thin and white, anæmically white, making the flood of colour surging out of a body all the more of a marvel.

At last, when this vision arose once more, it became so disturbing that Len got to his feet. With half-closed eyes and half-parted lips he stood and held his breath, conscious that he himself blushed

all over his body, the blood slowly rising into his face with a feeling of heat.

Suddenly the eternal wonder of the growing being seemed as of its own accord to take a direction. Something in him seemed to whisper, "Ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil!"

For some reason which he avoided explaining to himself, he turned west and began to step briskly along. He looked up at the sun. It might be three o'clock. He was glad it was not yet time to go home.

Half an hour later he came, still threading the poplar forest, to Hausman's line fence. He was on the point of turning back; for he seemed half aware that he had obeyed a shameful impulse. But after a moment's hesitation he climbed the fence and passed on, over half-cleared ground from which all large timber had been removed. South of him the young bush thinned out entirely: beyond, lay the strip of Hausman's field. There, walking would have been easier; but he was reluctant to emerge into the open space, as if he were bent on a furtive errand. Then he came to the yard fence and stopped.

South of the cabin he saw two or three groups of children: Willy with other boys of his age, was sitting on the tongue of a wagon; Lydia carried a baby, tossing it up and down; the smaller children were playing hide-and-seek about the barn. A dog was chasing about, worrying a rag which Ernest tried to pull away. The Hausmans, too, had callers —as who had not in the bush on church days?

As Len stood there, looking on and half wishing to join the others, yet hesitating to do so, Lydia

suddenly called one of the older girls who, in their white muslin dresses, were sitting on a bench. Len could distinctly hear her voice.

"Minnie," she said, "you take the baby for awhile, will you?"

And Minnie did.

Lydia went to the back of the yard, past the well and the granary which was, as is often the case on a pioneer homestead, the best-built structure on the place.

Len knew he had come to see her. Some obscure instinct told him that she could interpret for him what he had felt that afternoon; and, having scarcely passed the stage where a boy looks with contempt on girls and would not for the world let others see that they interest him, he hesitated about entering the yard. But he waited.

For five minutes he waited in vain. Then a dry, crackling sound of breaking twigs startled him in his rear. He veered about; and there stood Lydia, thin, slender, delicate like the deer he had seen.

"I saw you from the yard," she said; and a blush, rising from her bare throat, spread slowly over her face.

Len, looking at her, remembered his own blush earlier in the day, when he had felt himself blushing all over his body. A strange weakness came over him. But he controlled himself and deliberately falsified his attitude by assuming a swagger in his gait as he approached her. "Let's go for a walk," he said.

"All right," the girl answered shyly, smiling up

into his face. She was fully as tall as Len; but her narrow, sloping shoulders made her look frail and extremely light. Something of the blush still lingered in her face which now looked very alluring in white and rose. Her smooth, flaxen hair, gathered in a knot above the nape of her neck, had, from the shadows cast by the boles, dark-golden glimmers in it. Len had never seen her like that: she was a bud opening in the summer air. Last winter she had still worn her hair in two long braids.

She was stepping along ahead of him. He had a near view of her neck where a few short, silky hairs were curling into the hollow of the nape; and as he looked at them, his heart began to pound.

She wore a dress of white lawn, much worn with many washings and somewhat ill-fitting, too; but that Len did not see. To him she looked surprisingly beautiful and alluring. He was glad he had come. Reality excelled all visions.

They went on in silence, winding their way through the bush. There seemed to be nothing in the whole world to speak about. Yet speech seemed imperative. They might have done what they longed to do and never said a word: what they longed to do was to touch each other; but neither dared.

At last, when they came to the edge of the field, Lydia stopped; the moment she did so, Len felt he must speak and cleared his throat.

"Are you going to go to school next winter?"

"I may." She lowered her eyes. "Let's sit for

awhile," she added, pointing to the fallen trunk of a tree. "Are you?"

"No." Deliberately he put a note of indifference into his voice. "I am going away."

She looked up.

"To Deer River. To work in a lumber camp."

"Deer River? Where is that?"

"North-west. Two hundred miles from here."

A silence fell. "When?" Lydia breathed.

"I don't know. Soon. I am going with Joseph." As, before, he had forced a swagger into his gait, so he now forced a swagger into his voice. He acted under an impulse to worry and torture her. But with a quick glance at her face he saw that all her colour had disappeared. Yet he felt a savage satisfaction. "I suppose you are glad?" he asked.

"Why should I be glad?"

"Oh," he said. "Just so."

She stared at him, her dark-blue eyes wide open.

"You like Henry Kugler. I'll be out of the way."

"No," she replied with the ghost of a voice. "I don't like him."

"He's strong."

"He's a bully."

Len's feeling of satisfaction deepened.

"You," she hesitated. "You seem to be glad you won't go to school?"

He stretched a leg in front of him. "I can't be going to school forever. I am getting too old to sit with the kids. A man's got to make his living."

The girl was silent. "Then," she said after

awhile, not without a note of coquetry, "I don't think I want to go either."

They looked at each other and reddened.

Len rose and stepped close till his hand touched her shoulder. At that they shrank from each other. Yet, when he sat down again, it was close to her.

"I thought you were fond of learning?" she asked.

"Yes," Len said with an effect as if he were dropping a mask. "It's all nonsense. I didn't mean what I said. I don't know whether I want to go or not. I shall have to, I think. But I'd rather stay, now." Slowly and tentatively he lifted his hand behind her and put it about her shoulders.

Bending forward and contracting, as it were, she sank into his arms. They kissed and drew apart again.

For a long while they sat by each other, a half-guilty look in their eyes. Then, as if by no volition of their own, their fingers met; and an electric current passed from one to the other.

Len cleared his throat. "Lydia, I shall have to go. I should prefer to go to school. I want to be a teacher. Oh, I don't know. Mr. Crawford does not think I should be a farmer. I am not very strong. And I should like to learn. I should like to learn all there is to be learned and be a great man. But it is a long way off. I should have to go to school for three more years. Then I could teach; and that, Mr. Crawford says, is only a beginning. But if I get that far, I should have a chance. To get there, I'd do

anything on earth. I think I shall work at my books even in the lumber camp."

"Yes," she whispered, "you've always done well."

"It isn't that. Others do well; but they do it by hard work. I can't express what I mean." He looked at the sun and rose.

Eyes lowered, she did likewise and waited.

Len, seeing it, hesitated himself. His mind was groping about for something to say which might convey a fraction of what he felt. Nothing seemed adequate. His breast expanded; he stammered, "Lydia, will you think of me when I'm gone?"

"Always," she whispered half audibly.

Once more they stood.

Then, with a look and a smile at each other, they parted.

But they had not gone a dozen paces before Len turned. "Lydia!"

"Yes?" She had known that there must be something to follow.

"Will you meet me again? Here? Next Sunday?"

That did not release the tension; but it was something to look forward to. "I'll wait for you here," she said and nodded.

When next they looked back, the bush stood between them.

Len gained the road and stepped out briskly. It was the time of the evening when the sun, though still shining, has lost his power to illumine and to heat. Nighthawks were circling through the quiet air, veering and careening in their bold, freaky

flight. In Len, a sweet, cool, chaste exaltation arose, in keeping with the quality of the hour.

He passed the cross-roads leading north to where the Dicks lived, the youngest in age of the settlers in this district. A fleeting thought of Helen Dick crossed his mind. She was a mere child; he was old and wise, knowing much of life; that life which he was going to conquer!

He went on and on and came in sight of the yard and house which had been home to him. Since he had left the place a few hours ago, he had sailed the seven seas and been away for years. He was changed: strong, yet weary: an adventurer coming home from a raid. He could have sung out to announce his coming; for in him sang the blood of youth.

The house, in the evening light, looked unchanged, unchangeable, homelike, sheltered; it suggested a family circle, protection, rest. He carried a secret in his heart which nobody shared who lived in that house.

That moment his stepfather issued from the door, preceded by the guest of the afternoon. They came to the open gate and stopped, conversing. They looked grey and dark down there, as if they had arrayed themselves on purpose to fit and blend into the evening landscape.

Len slanted down from the grade. He had to pass by them.

But his stepfather spoke. "Well, you got back, did you? Wait a moment. I have talked it over with Joseph. He'll see whether he can get you a job with

that outfit. Maybe you have thought it over yourself? He wants you to repeat that you are willing to go. You are not afraid to leave home, are you?"

"No. I'm not afraid."

"And you'll go?"

"Yes, I'll go."

"That's all right, then," Kolm concluded, and looked at his guest.

"I guess so," Joseph said. "I'll start tomorrow. I'll write when he is to meet me."

Len went on, feeling all of a sudden committed.

Chapter V

LEAVE-TAKINGS

WEEKS had gone by. Len was busy on the farm where his stepfather did the last work on the new breaking while the boys still gathered stones and roots.

At last Charlie began to go to school again; and, strange to say, he seemed willing and even anxious to do so. The fact was that the Dicks had decided to send Helen. Mr. Crawford sent word that he wished to see Len.

The Kolms had heard nothing from Joseph except that Len would find some "job" at Deer River, but that they would not go till there was snow on the ground.

Len had met Lydia every Sunday; and the thought of the separation filled him with a vague dread. When Charlie began to go to school, old longings and ambitions revived and plucked at his heart. But he had given a promise; and the new consideration with which his stepfather treated him as the future earner of money felt grateful.

When, on November 7, he called on his old teacher, the grey, lowering sky seemed to bring the time of departure threateningly near.

Mr. Crawford, as was his way, said many strange things.

"I have put aside a little pile of books for you. Just stories I want you to read. And a few plays. Good literature. Take them along. There will be Sundays even in camp. I wish you would write me of your experiences and of your reading. These books will further you on your way. Don't give up, Len. You have a start. Not all of an education is necessarily acquired at school. No schooling can give you the brains; at best it can teach you how to use them. Don't believe either that you are getting too old for that sort of thing. You will meet with fools who will sneer at you because you aim high. Don't listen to them."

And, after awhile, he went on. "You are of the stuff of which wise men are made, Len, not learned men. What, in all branches of knowledge we really investigate is ourselves. Perfect knowledge would be no more than an accurate tracing out of the limitations of the human mind. You may not get all the facts. But one day, I hope, you will understand that that does not matter. A man may be learned without being fit for anything but the gathering of fact to fact unless he has the spark divine. If he has, facts are nothing. It is the road that matters, not the goal."

The boy sat silent, enslaved by the man's personality.

"Good-by," he said at last. "And thanks!" And awkwardly he stumbled through the door, squeezing the parcel of books under his arm.

As Len, at the gate, clambered on to the big horse's back, the old man stood at the window

looking on, half thinking, half muttering to himself. "What a shame! To think of the boys in towns or cities, sons of well-to-do merchants, lawyers, cabinet ministers, squandering in a month what would enable this child to get his start in life. What do they do at school? At best they are anxious to secure their 'standing' from year to year! But in a pioneer district genius is left to exhaust itself in the fight against adversity!"

Len was riding north. A flurry of snow had thickened during the hour he had spent at the teacher's cottage. It was now whirling about him in dense flakes. Already the grass of the slough was bending under the cover which was to conceal it for the rest of the winter.

Len was in a strange state of mind, resembling that in which a believer of the Catholic church may be after having confessed and received a plenary absolution from the vicar of God. Never before had he felt with the same convincing force that this man loved him.

He sat on his horse with his head drawn into the collar of his sweater, to prevent the snow from finding its way down his neck. He shivered though he remained unconscious of it. In him burned a fire which made him insensible to the external cold. Great and glorious, life stretched before him: far away, dimly seen, on its horizon, stood a goal. That goal was greatness.

When, arrived at home, he was tying his horse in its stall, Charlie suddenly shot out from some-

where, slapped him on his arm, cried, "Tag," and dodged away again.

Len had not yet recalled himself from the world in which he had lived but now. A moment later, however, he stood ready, every muscle taut though he preserved his absent mien.

Charlie, thinking him disinclined to play, approached.

Len watched; and as soon as his brother was near enough, he sprang and caught him by the neck, tagging him half a dozen times on his back. Charlie yelled with surprise and threw himself down on a pile of hay in one of the stalls. The horses raised their heads and looked over the partitions at the disturbing noise.

"I've got you, you whippersnapper!" Len said grimly.

"I know something," Charlie hinted, trying to squirm away.

But Len held him while he sat down by his brother's recumbent body. "Now tell what you know."

"I won't!"

Len began to tickle his sides.

"Yes, yes!" Charlie yelled. "Don't tickle! I'll tell!"

Len straddled him. "All right. I am waiting."

A moment's pause. Then Charlie tried once more to free himself by a violent struggle.

"Oh-o!" Len said. "Is that your game? I'll teach you to cheat!" And he resumed the task of tickling

his brother into submission. "Ready now to keep faith?" he asked at last.

"Sure," Charlie cried, exhausted with laughing.

"All right." Len sat back.

"Father went to Jackson's. He got a letter."

"From whom?"

"From Joseph."

Len rose from his brother's body. The abstraction which had pervaded his face returned. "When?" he asked moodily.

"When what? Oh, yes. Thursday night."

Len picked the awns of skunk grass from his trousers; and, taking the parcel of books which he had balanced on the partition between two stalls, he went over the thickening blanket of snow to the house.

His mother was working in the kitchen; his stepfather, reclining in the living room.

From the woman's indignantly defiant attitude Len gathered that there had been a quarrel. Whenever the relation between his parents obtruded itself, he felt embarrassed. He was judicious beyond his years; and in the light of new knowledge new angles in that relationship were constantly being revealed to him. So far he had always sided with his mother; but he began to feel critical with regard to her.

As he entered the living room to deposit his parcel, Kolm rose, stretched himself, and, raising his voice, for the benefit or the provocation of his wife, he said, "Len, I have word from Joseph. You go on Thursday night."

In the kitchen, pot or pan slammed down on the stove with a clatter.

Len looked at the man who stood in front of him. To his relief he saw a smile on his lips.

Kolm stepped forward, filling the frame of the door to the kitchen. "Softly, Anna," he said mockingly; "what's that pot done to you?"

"Out with you!" she yelled at him, pointing to the yard door.

Kolm took a step, turned his wife around so that he stood behind her back, caught her elbows in his hands, and held her. Then he bent forward as a lover might whisper into the ear of his mistress, "What's eating you? Need a straightening out? Come upstairs. I'll give it to you."

The woman went limp under his laugh. In a sudden relaxation of all her muscles she sank against his chest. He bent down to her as if to plant a kiss on her mouth; but with a sudden turn of her head, she brought that mouth up to his ear and bit its lobe.

"Hi!" he yelled. "You hussy!" And again he laughed. "That's the way I like you, you cat!" Releasing her, he touched her with his elbow and, with a leering look, pointed to the stairway.

"No!" she said, stamping her foot.

But he looked steadily into her eye. "Not now, eh?"

She, vanquished, whispered half fondly, "No. Think of the children!"

"All right," he whispered back. "I can wait." And he left the room.

Len had been standing motionless. He had heard

every word. His face was flaming with colour. Reaching for one of the books, he dropped to the couch and acted as if he were absorbed in reading. A moment later his mother peered in to see whether he had listened or not. . . .

In the afternoon, both boys asked for leave of absence. Charlie slipped away through the bush to go to Dicks'. Len went along the grade to the west.

When he reached Hausman's corner, he climbed through the fence and turned south till he came to the clearing which divided the farm.

At the usual place nobody waited to meet him. But then it was early. He stamped about in the new-fallen snow.

Thus he waited and waited. Half an hour went by; and nobody came. He felt worried and desolate.

Then, suddenly, he descried Lydia's figure flitting through the bush with a preoccupied air.

"Len," she cried breathlesly, as soon as their hands had touched. "I can't stay but a moment. Mr. Smith from Odensee is here. He's come to hire me for the winter, for house-work. I slipped out. But if I stayed away any length of time, they'd be sure to notice."

"I . . ." Len stammered. "I'm going on Thursday, at night."

"I am going today."

"Today?"

"Yes," Lydia went on excitedly. "Mrs. Smith is expecting a baby. She is sickly. There are six children, and she needs help."

"Then you won't go to school?"

"To school!" She spurned the very idea, her face flushed in a way which seemed to estrange her. She looked tempting but quite unfamiliar to Len. "He'll pay me five dollars a month. Oh Len, I am glad!"

He looked at her; her animation seemed so foreign.

"You silly!" she cried, kissing him. "You can write to me there, don't you see? Miss Lydia Hausman, care of Mr. Aleck Smith, Odensee."

"Yes," Len agreed wistfully. "I could not have written here."

"No. And for me it will be less tedious while I am waiting. I hate the bush. It's all open fields down there. The Smiths are rich. They hailed out like ourselves. But you should hear Mr. Smith! That's nothing, he says. If I have a crop once in three years, I'm all right!"

Len mused. This was not what he had counted on. He had been willing to go with Joseph so long as he knew this girl would be waiting and pining for him in the bush. Jealousy fastened on to his heart and sucked his life-blood. "There are lots of other boys there!" he said.

She laughed, but her laughter hurt. "I must go," she cried. "I am getting wet. They will notice if I stay too long." But she still looked at him, half provoking, half amused.

"Well," Len sighed. And then he bent forward and touched her cheek with a finger.

Again she laughed and brushed his lips with hers. "Len," she whispered coquettishly, "don't look at another girl!"

His arms were about her; and as he kissed her again and again, she closed her eyes and smiled. At last, disengaging herself, she stepped back and waved her hand at him with a nervous gesture. And again she was by his side. "Len," she said, "don't stand like a block. Say something. In spring you'll be back. And so shall I!"

But he found nothing to say. How could she laugh? He reached for her hands. "Good-by!" he whispered.

"Good-by, Len! Don't look at anyone else, do you hear?"

Dumbly he shook his head.

For a moment longer she waited. "Good-by!"

"Good-by!"

She ran; and when she turned once more, she saw him rapidly striding away.

He could not have said what it was; but his heart was wrenched by a vast pain, by an unspeakable woe not to be grasped by thought.

Chapter VI

DEPARTURE

THE weather was wintry but mild.

The leave-taking between mother and son had been brief and almost wordless. "Write when you get there," she had said.

Charlie had climbed on to the load of the sleigh to accompany his brother for a short piece of the road; for, since his stepfather was going to town, he remained at home for the day.

As they were gliding west, Len looked back to the house. At the window of the living room he saw his mother's head and waved his hand. A moment later the farmstead had been absorbed by the bush.

Kolm stopped the team and turned to Charlie. "Get off," he said.

Charlie looked at Len. His lips twitched.

"Don't blubber!" Len whispered. "Be good! Bye-bye."

"Bye-bye!" the younger boy answered as he climbed down over the tail-gate.

"And mind you go after the cows not later than five!" Kolm sang out.

White and thin, Len sat in his place; and as the horses walked on, he saw his brother standing in the road, hesitating and disconsolate.

They went on in silence, reclining on the load of potatoes which Kolm had decided to take along. For miles and miles they went on. The grade came to an end in a dry slough, sending a blunt nose into the lower levels. Bands of willow formed criss-cross patterns there, and the trail turned south.

At last they emerged into a denser settlement, widely cleared, where every quarter section held a prosperous farmstead. That was the village of Odensee, seven miles east of McDougall, the town.

Again they were on a grade. Len knew the village; for before the Jacksons had taken over the post office at Macdonald, he had sometimes gone here on horseback to fetch the mail.

As they glided along, Len braced himself for a question and cleared his throat. "Father," he asked, "where does Mr. Smith live?"

"What?" Kolm asked. "Schmidt? Why do you want to know?"

Len reddened. "Oh," he said, "just so."

But Kolm looked at him and whistled. "Ah-a!" he said. "Oh-o! That's where the wind lies, eh?" And without answering he turned his back.

Len bit his lip, sitting white and still.

They passed farm after farm and neared the half-mile turn to the south where a tobacco-brown school-house stood at the corner.

Kolm turned and nodded his head. "That's Schmidt's."

Len winced. A large, white-painted house with a veranda, prosperous and haughty, looked discouragement. Nothing stirred in the yard.

But at the very moment when the horses turned, a slender white figure appeared at an upstairs window, waving a hand.

It was too late for Len to respond, for the view was cut off by the school-house; and beyond, a fringe of trees intervened.

Shortly before noon, they pulled into town, a straggling village with three streets converging towards the station. A huge red-brick house was the first they came to, followed by a two-roomed school.

Between stores, lumber-yard, livery stable, and bank they drove on till they reached the station. Kolm jumped to the ground and tied his horses to a telephone post. Len took his bundle and climbed down.

Having jerked the cream can from the load, Kolm mounted the steps to the platform. Len had never yet seen a railway track.

In the waiting room a clean-shaven little man sat with his back to the wicket, fingering a clicking piece of apparatus.

They waited.

At last, without turning, the operator asked, "What is it?"

"I've got a cream can."

"All right."

Len was impressed with the insignificance of his self.

"I'd like a receipt," Kolm said after a further wait.

Len was struck by the submissive note in Kolm's voice.

The operator grumbled; but, after a minute or so, he rose and began to fill out a blank on the shelf of the wicket.

"Name?"

"Kolm."

"Spell that."

Kolm did. "Here's a boy," he added. "He's going to go out on the two o'clock north. Can he leave his bundle?"

"He cannot," the operator replied with indignant decision. "What do you think this is? A cloakroom?"

Kolm laughed, embarrassed.

When they left, Len still lugged the bundle which was heavy with books.

"Well," Kolm said when he had untied the horses, "we'll try to sell the potatoes, I guess."

They reached a store on the southernmost street. Kolm threw the lines to Len, saying, "Wait," and springing to the ground.

Len felt vaguely but immensely depressed. This was not what he had imagined travelling to be. He wished he were back on the farm.

Kolm reappeared. "Don't want them," he said. "Drive on." And he went ahead on the sidewalk.

The horses pulled. Len knew how to handle them, but men frightened him.

Once more they stopped at a store. Once more Kolm, having entered, reappeared. "Don't want them either. We'll have to try the Jew."

Again he led the way, this time going west till they were nearly back at the station. In front of a store, dry-goods, brooms, strings of work-boots, and similar wares were displayed in the open. A short, fat, bearded old Jew stood in the door, blinking in the sunshine.

"What have you got?" he asked with a hard stare at Kolm and Len.

"Potatoes."

The Jew raised his pudgy hands to the height of his shoulders, palms forward, and cast a despondent glance to heaven.

"Don't want them?"

"Eferybody's bringing potatoes. There is nothing else in the gountry!" the Jew replied.

Two young men, sleek, fastidiously dressed and shaved, appeared in the door, smiling; and, looking down on the load, they whispered to each other. They were unmistakably sons of the old man below them.

"Potatoes have no price at all this year," one of them said.

"Damn funny," Kolm said grimly. "They feed as many mouths as ever."

One of the young men spoke to the father who shrugged his shoulders, raised his hands, and turned into the door with a gesture of disgust.

"Tell you, Kolm," the young man said. "It's turning colder. You can't take that load home without freezing it. I don't want your potatoes; but I'd like to help you out. If you'll dump them for ten cents a bushel, I'll take them. Just to oblige."

"I'll be hanged first," Kolm replied.

The two Jews laughed. "As you please."

Kolm clicked his tongue. "See you later. See you in hell!"

For hours they lingered about the station. The sun was obscured by a haze; and it did turn cold.

At last Kolm spoke. "I was going to give you a dollar."

"What for?"

"You might need a few cents."

Then silence again. But about four o'clock Kolm spoke once more. "I'll have to go. I'll have the potatoes frozen on me if I don't."

Len nodded. "I'll go along for a piece," he said. The truth of the matter was that he wished to postpone the moment of parting.

They drove east and then north till they came to the first turn in the road. Then something happened which was unique in Len's experience. Kolm began to swear in a truly terrifying way. At the same time he left the road for its grassy margin and began to turn. The horses, not understanding the manœuvre, behaved awkwardly. Kolm gathered the ends of the lines in his hand and lashed them brutally. In a brisk trot they returned to town; and Kolm drew in in front of the Jewish store.

One of the fashionable young men appeared in the door. "Changed your mind?" he asked.

"What was the blood-sucker price you offered?" Kolm looked straight ahead.

"Ten cents a bushel—in trade."

Again Kolm swore. "Doggone you for a dirty Jew! I want a dollar in cash."

The young man smiled. "All right. Drive into the lane."

"Better go in first and ask the hog that begot you."

"No need. This is a private speculation of mine."

"Speculation?" Kolm repeated. "It's a safe game. You'll sell them at two dollars in spring."

"I hope you're a prophet!" the young man smiled.

In the store, Kolm bought a half bag of flour and a quarter's worth of sugar, leaving without so much as nodding to clerk or owners. His deep-sunk eyes looked moody; the droop in the shoulders of his body betrayed his dejection. Len had never seen him thus: he was out of place in town: he needed the bush and the fields for his background.

Again they left the village, and a mile or so beyond the turn Kolm stopped. "You better go back now, Len," he said gently. "You've got your bundle to carry. You understand, I hope. When the train pulls in, you want to be on the platform and look sharp for Joseph. Sit in the waiting room; it's warm there. Take the rest of the lunch. And here's the dollar. Put it where you can't lose it. Joseph's got your ticket. There is nothing to pay. When you get there, write to your mother. And don't send any money till Christmas."

"All right," Len said, climbing over the side of the sleigh.

"Good-by. And be good."

"Good-by, father," Len replied and placed his hand into that of the man. He winced under its pressure.

Then the sleigh was briskly disappearing around the bend of the road. Len shouldered his bundle to start life on his own account.

The rest of the afternoon was an eternity of tedious waiting. Len sat in the room provided for that purpose at the station. In the dusk of the evening the operator passed by him as he left his office.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked.

"I'm going out on the two o'clock train."

"Got your ticket?"

"No."

"Can't wait here without a ticket. Can't buy a ticket at night."

"I am to meet a man. He's got my ticket. He comes by the train."

"Where are you going?"

"Elk Lake."

The man whistled. "Working for the Deer River outfit?"

"Yes."

"Do they take kids?"

Len shrugged his shoulders. "I am to meet Joseph."

"Ever been in a train before?"

"No."

"Tell you. I've got to lock up. The night operator doesn't come till midnight. I'll tell him to wake you in time for the train. You lie down on that bench and sleep."

"All right. Thanks."

This was the first bit of kindness Len had received from a stranger; and it made him feel less homesick. Within a few minutes he was sound asleep on the bench.

It seemed, however, as though he had not slept more than a few minutes before he felt himself shaken by the shoulder.

"Train's due in a quarter of an hour," a strange voice said.

"All right." Excitement invaded Len like a flood.

Two coal-oil lamps, fastened to the wall by brackets, illumined the scene. The air was heavy with the smell of garlic. Five figures were lying on the benches which lined two walls; on the floor, too, half a dozen men reclined, some snoring stertorously. It was a sight of unrestrained abandonment to rest. They looked like beings from an underground world: mis-shapen dwarfs released from a cave.

Len pulled himself up, grasped his bundle, and, stepping carefully over the recumbent figures, climbed to the door. When he opened it and the icy air struck into the room, a raucous voice swore at him.

Outside, Len stood shivering. Strange things seemed to be going on in the darkness of the air, supernatural things. A wooden arm, with a green light at its shoulder, raised itself against the glittering stars. Len's heart pounded. At the north end of the platform dim shapes were handling things while a small, round lantern bobbed up and down. No train was in sight.

Being assailed by the sudden, fierce cold of the night, Len tried to return into the waiting room where the presences were human at least. But when he opened the door, the air from the inside smote him like a bodily blow: it bore the hot, mephitic stench of the exhalations of human bodies mixed with the smell of garlic. Just as a mumbled curse became articulate, he shrank back.

That moment, far in the south, a whistle shrilled through the air.

Len took a firmer hold on his bundle. Out of the night, a dim radiance seemed to condense; objects began to cast shadows as though they were emanations of their solidity. He turned to the south.

A fiery eye had appeared in the distance, so white that it blinded him. The rails alongside the platform began to heave in its glimmer, emitting incomprehensible sounds. The light increased till it assumed the quality of a pitiless incandescence. In his excitement Len did not even feel that his teeth were chattering and his knees shaking.

He looked north. A group of men had sprung out of the darkness, handling huge trunks which glistened wetly in the snow-white glare. Beyond, the grain elevators loomed as in daylight. But all about, darkness stood like a towering scaffold. Again he turned south. There, a roaring monster came rolling along, blinding everything with its single, evil eye. Pale and smoke-blackened, a man was leaning from the cab of the engine, peering ahead. Then darkness fell again. Len felt as if he must madly rush about till he landed under the feet of the moving monster. If behind him there had

been a field or the bush, he would have run, flinging up his arms. But behind him, as if to increase the terror, the door was opened and slammed, opened and slammed, three or four times in succession. Those goblins that had been sleeping and snoring in their hot den, on benches and floor, had come to life and were rushing past him.

The train came to a stop; here and there a word was shouted. From the corner of the station, where the steps led up from the street, two or three figures appeared, going to the cars. A few people alighted.

Len stood helpless. It seemed an eternity since the train had come to a stop. Was he going to be left behind? A strange, deep voice sang out from somewhere. "All aboard!" At the sound of that voice Len felt the need for instant action. Short, hissing sounds came from in front.

That moment somebody pushed him. "Len!" he heard his name called. "Come on! Run!" It was Joseph.

Already the train was gathering motion. Joseph ran; Len followed.

Catching hold of a hand-rail, Joseph walked on with the puffing train. "Quick!" he shouted in German. "Jump!"

With the effort of desperation Len threw his bundle into the dark hole to which Joseph pointed and scrambled after it, falling on to the platform of the train. Joseph followed him with a swing of his body at the very moment when the platform of the station was slipping away from under his feet.

PART II. YOUTH

"Amer savoir qu'on tire du voyage!"

Chapter I

THE CAMP

LEN and Joseph arrived in camp in the dusk of evening, after a tramp of sixteen miles from the station which was commonly designated by the word "town", though this town consisted of no more than two stores, a boarding house, and the siding of the "D. R. L. & W. Co." which was flanked by its long, narrow sheds.

Where the road which had brought them north, through a dense forest of trees—poplar, spruce, and larch—opened into the enormous clearing of the camp, the shorter west end of the rectangle was occupied by office and store buildings. Opposite the road gap stood the "cook house"; east of it, four long, low, shed-like structures which provided the sleeping quarters for the men. Opposite these, along the south edge, rose stables and shops, shed-like and low like the rest of the buildings. The material used in their construction consisted of huge logs which gave them an air of unusual permanency and durability though they had just been erected for a single winter's operations. All about the clearing, the dense forest stood black and mysterious. In spite of the bright lights shining forth from office and cook house the camp looked deserted. The ground was covered with hard-beaten snow.

They "checked in" at the office.

As they entered the room which, for a temporary structure, looked remarkably finished, a tall, thin man extricated himself from a swivel chair at the desk to the left, behind a counter which divided the available space. He had been reclining, his feet propped up on the desk top, and was smoking a cigarette through a tube.

Apparently they did not need to state their errand, for the tall man reached under the counter and produced, in the most leisurely way, an enormous book. He was unmistakably a Jew: his reddish-yellow, curled hair and his eagle nose betrayed him. Len felt intimidated by the fastidious elegance of his clothes, the high white collar around his neck, and the long, immaculate flexibility of his fingers.

Slowly the Jew turned the pages of the book. At last he took a gold-mounted fountain pen from the upper left-hand pocket of his white vest and held it poised over the page.

"Name?" he asked, raising one thin, copper-coloured eyebrow at Joseph and tilting his head so as to keep the smoke of his cigarette from entering his eye.

"Karl Joseph."

"Hired in the city?"

Joseph produced a card which the Jew took with pointed fingers as though he feared to soil himself by the contact. He placed it along the entry he was making in the book and copied slowly whatever items he needed. Then he turned to his desk, tak-

ing a sheet of paper from a drawer, and glanced down a list of type-written names. When he found the one he was looking for, he carefully checked it off.

Next he raised the other eyebrow at Len. "Name?" he repeated.

"Leonard Sterner."

Again Joseph held out a card.

The Jew took it, glanced at it, and raised both eyebrows at once. "How is that?" he asked with an exaggerated air of suspicion. "The name given here is Len Kolm."

"Kolm is my stepfather's name," Len explained uneasily.

The Jew clicked his tongue as if he had just received an exquisite item of scandalous gossip. But he began to write in the most unruffled serenity of indifference. "Spell," he said.

Next the Jew took two little card-board squares, stepped to the wall where the ground-plans of four buildings were displayed, made two marks on one of them, wrote a figure each on the tickets, and flicked them over as the dealer in a game of cards deals out a deck.

"Bunk-house one," he said with great distinctness.

"When do we start?" Joseph asked.

"Tomorrow. Since you are here."

"And where?"

"Ask the camp boss."

"Who is he?"

"You'll find out."

"Do we get supper tonight?"

"Cook house," the Jew said wearily as if he were neither used nor inclined to be questioned this way.

"Do we get our wages here?" Joseph asked anxiously.

But the Jew waved a disdainful hand to the door.

Outside, they went along the front of the buildings in the margin of the clearing to the north. These buildings were numbered with figures five feet high.

In "Bunk-House One" they found a pleasant-faced young fellow with gold-flashing teeth and round, ruddy cheeks who assigned them their beds. He introduced himself as Charlie, the bull-cook. By the time they had deposited their bundles, it was pitch-dark outside; and the clearing burst into life with the crews returning from the skidways.

The bull-cook directed them to the cook house; and when Joseph, by gestures, apologetic and ostentatiously exaggerated, asked where they could clean up, he told them that there was a wash-room behind the cook house. They turned, between the rows upon rows of bunks, to the door of the huge, low hall heated by three large, round-bellied iron stoves. But before they reached it, a crowd of big, bustling figures broke in, laughing and joking or quiet and sedate according as they were young or middle-aged. For a moment it seemed like a sea of humanity surging up. Then they dispersed to their bunks as a crest-wave flattens out on the beach.

Outside, far in the east, the ruddy dawn of an almost full moon stood behind the lattice tracery of tree tops.

In the cook house, consisting of dining room and kitchen, both lighted by glaring gasoline lamps, they were placed, by one of the "cookies" or flunkeys, at one of the ten long tables, each set for sixteen men, which ran through the room in a north-south direction. An eleventh table stood at right angles to these, at the far end, opposite the door. The men who were crowding in wore sheepskins and trousers tucked into high-laced boots; and they continued to laugh and to chatter only as far as the door, going silent as they entered and removed their caps as in church. Nobody sat down at the single table which stood at right angles to the others.

As soon as they were seated, they "fell to" without waiting for others, with the huge appetites of those who have worked all day in the open winter air. All dishes were of grey enamel ware. Every now and then somebody, without a word, raised an empty platter above his head; and immediately one of the flunkeys jumped for it, to disappear through a door into the kitchen whence, within a minute or so, he brought it back filled. The food was good and rich, consisting of braised meat, potatoes, gravy, bread and butter, and pies and cakes in enormous numbers. There was a choice of tea, coffee, and milk.

After awhile the door opened once more and a man came in whom nobody needed to name. It

was the boss, huge, massive, imperturbable. Without a look at anyone he removed his sheep-skin and fur cap which a cookie took from him, proceeded along the walls to the centre of the single table at right angles to the rest, and sat down on the only chair to be found in the place. A waiter ran and bent to his side as, in a low, friendly, but curt voice, he gave his order. Within a few minutes he was served individually.

Two or three others dropped in after him and took their seats at his table. But, like the rest of the crew, these sat on benches and helped themselves from the common platters loaded with food.

Len's eyes always strayed back to the boss.

This man had a straw-yellow shock of short hair which stood up in all directions; his face, consisting of enormous curved and bulging surfaces, was divided by a moustache of the same colour and texture as his hair. His light-blue eyes, restless in their sockets, were strangely small for so large a head.

Most of the time, he sat very still, bent over his plate from which he picked a bite now and then, absent-mindedly. His eyes roamed over the room, without a corresponding motion of his head. He gulped a glass of milk and, as he caught the eye of one of the flunkeys, moved a finger, pointing to the empty glass. The flunkey sprang to his side to refill it. He gave the slightest of nods in acknowledgment. He ate very sparingly.

A number of men finished their meal and rose, some rolling cigarettes, some filling their pipes, and

some chewing tooth-picks as they put on their caps and filed out. The places of a few were retaken by others who entered.

Joseph also finished and sat back with a grunt of satisfaction. "Feels good," he said to Len, in German.

Half a dozen looks were raised to his face at the sound of the foreign language. Nobody else spoke except in a whisper.

Joseph grinned and broke into apologetic shrugs as he scrambled to his feet and stepped back over the bench. Len, feeling embarrassed at the breach of etiquette committed by him, rose to follow.

But the eye of the big man at the centre of the odd table had also flashed up at Joseph and now lighted on Len. When it did so, it flickered as in a signal; and a finger of the hand that lay on the table, by the side of the plate, was raised as if to stay him.

Len rounded the table.

The boss pushed his chair back, sitting sideways, and pointed with a finger to the corner of a bench.

Feeling limp and unhappy in anticipation, Len sat down.

"What do they call you?"

"Len Sterner."

"Len," the big man repeated in a deep, rumbling voice, not unkindly. "How old are you?"

"Eighteen," Len said with a sinking feeling.

The boss looked up. "Why did you give your age as twenty?"

"I didn't," Len said, not daring to look the man

in the face. "Mr. Joseph with whom I came did. He was afraid they might not take me."

"What is it to him?"

"He has never been out to a place like this and did not want to go alone. He is a neighbour of ours."

"Your father is a farmer?"

"Yes. He is my stepfather. We were hailed out last summer."

The big man gave the slightest of nods. Then he rose. "You stay in camp tomorrow. You can help the bull-cook. I saw you are limping. I shall try you on team-work. I am afraid you are too light." And he turned slowly away.

"Please!" Len said in his fear of being rejected.

The big man stopped.

Many eyes were curiously fastened on Len and the boss. "If it can be done at all," Len stammered, "I am willing to do anything."

"We'll see," the boss replied and strode off. At the door, he shouldered into his sheep-skin, stuck his fur cap on his head, and went out.

A few days later, having tried him at several light jobs, the boss placed Len in the cook house as a cookie or flunkey.

As soon as his duties—waiting at the tables, peeling potatoes, scraping carrots, etc.—had become a routine to Len, he lived, for the next two months, in the camp but not of it, except in as much as his work compelled him to take notice of it.

In the morning, he had to rise an hour before the crews; at night, he had to work an hour or two

later; and Sunday was no holiday for anyone employed in the cook house. But every day he had two hours off in the afternoon and used them for reading and writing; and his pay was the same as that of a sawyer, thirty dollars a month, without the sawyer's expense of providing heavy outdoor clothing.

Once more he immersed himself in his studies; in fact, he devoted more time to them than they had ever received at home except when he had actually been going to school. All day long he worked in a sort of feverish haste as if the fulfilment of his tasks were a mere preliminary to his two hours of leisure; and he rejoiced when he could add an extra fifteen minutes to that allowance of time.

Yet it goes without saying that his immediate surroundings, those of the cook house, obtruded themselves upon his attention.

The amount of food, for instance, which was needed to feed the crews was a subject of everlasting wonder to him. Daily half a beef was brought over from the store building. It was left to thaw and then cut up. Two bags of flour were consumed in a day; a bag and a half of sugar; immense quantities of prunes, raisins, dates; and lard by the five-gallon can. It was a never-ceasing stream from the store house, through the kitchen, into the famished digestive organs of this many-mouthed monster, the crew, which converted it into labour that showed in the form of logs cut from the forests, finally to

figure as so and so much profit on the books of that abstract being, the "company".

As for the kitchen itself and its government, the head-cook bore the nickname "the ogre". He owed it partly to his deformity—an undercook had one day struck him in his right eye with a red-hot poker—and partly to his temper which was savage. When he grew angry at anyone, he would throw boiling water or sizzling lard at him. Complaints on that score were common; and Mr. Smith, the boss, spoke sharply to him more than once. On the other hand, he had been with the company for many years; and he kept the commissary department running like clock-work. He was perhaps sixty years old.

Occasionally, on Sunday nights, when supper was served at five, work being done, this head-cook would sit on one of the large mixing tables, a long tin ladle in one hand, and become communicative, telling of the adventures of his youth. He was a Roumanian by birth and had been a ship's cook on the Black Sea and other waters. He knew every little "hole" on the Levant coasts. To his memory, Odessa, Constantinople, Smyrna, and Beirut were as present as the stores at Deer River; and he would talk of them with the disdain of the cosmopolite speaking to a crowd of backwoods men. When asked how he came to be stranded in the bush of the Canadian north-west—in summer he worked at the company's saw-mill, down at Elk Lake—he would wink grotesquely with his one sound, grey eye and snicker, "You'd like to know that story,

eh? I believe you, kid!" And he would get down from his throne on the mixing table, throw his ladle clatteringly on one of the two huge ranges, and walk lankly out, slamming the door between kitchen and dining room.

The two undercooks were pleasanter, if less interesting men, one of them being a short, fat, round-faced fellow who looked as if he had Chinese blood in him which he probably had. This man would take every second Saturday and Sunday off, disappear in the bush, and return early on Monday morning, in time to start work at four, but exhibiting the signs of having weathered a "spree". It was known that he debauched himself with drink and other vices. He was very silent about these absences; though he made no secret of it that he always drew his half month's pay before he left and that he never had a cent when he returned. Like the head-cook he lived entirely in these woods. In summer he acted as cookie in the smaller camp on the lake.

The three other flunkeys were as uninteresting specimens of pioneer farm youth as Len himself. They jeered at Len's habits; and especially made fun of him when, at Christmas, he drew his cheque and sent it by registered mail to his stepfather without retaining a cent for himself. Mr. Bright, the clerk, arranged the matter for him.

By that time he had read half a dozen plays of Shakespeare's, as many stories, and two little volumes of poetry—great literature which filled him

with a vague wonder and a dumb longing for an incomprehensible mastery in spiritual realms.

Apart from the kitchen crew, Joseph formed his one link with the world of living realities.

Joseph had become a "chainer". Whenever the sawyers had finished their task and a tree lay prostrate on the ground, two "limbers" went to work, lopping off branches and twigs—the slash—till the trunk lay straight and sheer. A second saw-gang did the measuring and cutting up of the trunk into what were called "commercial lengths": twenty-four, twenty, sixteen, twelve, or eight feet long: the less of the latter there were, the better. But many things had to be considered in deciding the length: among others that the planks ultimately to be cut from the logs must be reasonably free of serious knot-holes which would detract from the value of the lumber. This task completed, the chainers took charge, grouping the logs in a convenient way and putting the chains about them so as to have them ready for the "skid teamsters" who, working with single horses in the aisles of the bush, dragged them into piles where they remained for the "hook-men" who took them to the big sleighs, sixteen feet wide, on which, by the half dozen at a time, they were loaded with the help of a cable worked by four horses. Since the operations were continually shifting from place to place, it was next to impossible to instal automatic machinery. Horses, of which there were over a hundred in camp, supplied the power throughout.

This whole organisation of the work remained

hidden from Len till after Christmas when a great change came over him; but it formed the background for his life even now, through his association with Joseph. It was not his work that troubled Joseph; it was his leisure time.

Every evening he waited impatiently for Len, standing outside the cook house. When Len was late, Joseph swore and scolded. That was what he had taken the boy along for, he said; he could not bear to be alone. His temper was hot.

The two of them would go into the dark night, along one of the newly cut roads, Len shivering with the cold, for he still wore his thin mackinaw coat which was too small for him. As soon as they were beyond ear-shot of the camp, Joseph would stop and perhaps sit down on a log; and he would begin one of his ever-repeated Jeremiads.

"It's bad," he would say. "It's bad."

Len did not ask questions. He knew what was bad. He knew that all Joseph wanted was somebody to listen to him.

"My wife isn't well," Joseph went on. "She's got six children on her hands. I was ready to let her come. Then the war broke out. Curse Russia! Curse Germany! Why did the war have to come just then? I don't mind about myself. Let them put me in an internment camp! If I thought they'd exchange me and send me over there, I'd go and do something so they'd lock me up. I'd go to the city and yell in a crowded place, To hell with the British! I'd make something that looks like a bomb; and I'd throw it into their Parliament building. I want

my wife! For a week, or a day, or an hour! One hour with her, and I'd be willing to be shot. Oh hell!" he yelled.

"I shouldn't worry," Len said timidly. "She's all right, as likely as not."

"She's pretty," Joseph said despondently. "She is the prettiest woman I've ever seen. I was mad about her. There were dozens of others she could have had; but she took me! And when she'd borne me child after child, every year a child, and they all lived, then the devil came and tempted me and said, Go away to America: they give you land there; and you can be a master instead of a man. Then you can give her all she would like to have. And I fell and went. I worked; and I sent her money; and some I saved. And when I had enough to pay their fares, the war broke out. At first I thought it would be over in a few weeks. What are they fighting for anyway, the fools? It's lasted three years now. Three years!" And he sat and groaned, "If I could only see her! Just once! For a night or a day!"

"Wouldn't that make it all the harder afterwards?" Len asked.

"You don't know," Joseph said. "You're a child! You've never had a wife! They'll all be after her, over there—the young fellows that go to the wars. They don't care what they do. What's a sin more, they say, when we're going to die anyway? Let's get a little pleasure first. She's pretty, I tell you. She's twenty-eight now."

"Well," Len said, "while there's life, there is hope."

"It's easy for you to talk!" And Joseph trailed off into a series of inarticulate moans which ended in what was almost a howl.

Once he threw himself down in the snow and cried and cried like a child, disconsolate; and nothing would comfort him.

Then, after Christmas, simultaneously with the great change that came over Len, the two drifted apart. Joseph seemed "to go to the devil"; and Len lost his interest in books.

The latter was largely due to the fact that other men and their destinies began to absorb him. Real life pulsated all about him; and suddenly it took on a glowing, alluring appearance which it had never had.

There was, for instance, Bill Faryon, the filer, whose work was always done at night. He had his stand in a corner of the blacksmith shop, slantways across the clearing from the cook house. He was a slender, thin-faced man with a dreamy and yet debauched-looking eye and very peculiar hands. His fingers were long and slender, with square tips, finely shaped; the nails at their ends, though ragged and dirty, showed a neat form and a delicate colour like those of Mr. Crawford. Len found that Bill spoke German and French as fluently as his native English. He hardly ever spoke to anyone and took to Len only when he heard that this boy had books in camp. It seemed strange that a man interested in books should be the very one who, quite against his intention, inspired Len with a sort of contempt for them.

Bill was, in daytime, forever reclining in his bunk; and there Len began to call on him in the afternoon. As soon as Bill caught sight of him, he shouldered into his shabby sheep-skin; and the two would stroll through the bush or, when the weather was severe, sit in the blacksmith shop, screened from view by the machinery with which it was fitted. Among the books which Mr. Crawford had given to Len were several volumes of annotated editions of Shakespeare's plays. One of them was Richard II. Len soon found that Bill Faryon knew this play as well as he knew his catechism. Bill explained to him what had puzzled him in the character of the Lancastrian king; and though Len did not understand it all, he gained a great deal. "He's the type of an artist," Bill said. "He should have been a poet instead of a king. He never draws a practical conclusion from any situation. He merely tries to see himself as a dramatic hero in interesting attitudes."

Len, wondering where a filer could have come by such knowledge and insight, asked him one day, "How do you come to do this work, Bill? You've had an education, have you not?"—To Len an education was still something definite and measurable; you either have it or not; there were no gradations.—"I?" Bill asked. "I used to be professor of Germanic languages in Queen's university"—"That's one of the highest schools in the country, is it not?"—"Yea," Bill answered with intentional and contemptuous vulgarity in his tone. "But morally it's no better than this camp. They talk of

civilisation! Civilisation! What's brought me here? Drink. Drink and women. I don't care. I am cured. I am as well off here as anywhere else."

Len learned that Bill was married and had ten children.

In bad weather, as has been mentioned, they sat in the blacksmith shop. There, Archibald Lang worked with one helper at repairing chains, sleigh-runners, crow-bars, axes, and similar tools. To Len it became a pleasure to watch "Archie", a tall, thin, lank man, always black from his work, with arms which seemed to be composed of muscles of steel. His clean-shaven face looked grimly morose. He was a Mennonite of the second generation, perhaps forty years old. To watch him, he was the slowest man Len had ever seen; and yet, once he had attacked a piece of work, he finished it, while he seemed to be merely brooding over his task, in less time than it would have taken anyone else. Suppose he needed a hammer or a file while welding and called for his helper to hand it to him; then he would spend more time in pronouncing his words—"Here—give—me—that—hammer!" —than it took him to do the rest of the work; for every motion of his told. As a matter of fact, the helper had probably guessed at the first word what was wanted and handed it to him; but "Archie" went on with his sentence, muttering along, loose-lipped, even after his still unuttered request had been fulfilled. One day the helper who, in this respect, was Archie's antipode, said banteringly, "Shut up, Archie. You've got what you

want!" But Archie, having finished his task, slowly straightened his back, looked reproachfully at the young fellow, and, with exasperating slowness and seriousness, repeated the sentence, almost roaring the last words out; and then he stood there, with a quivering nether lip, staring every one who was laughing out of countenance.

The last one of Len's closer friends—he seemed to have a talent for picking those who were in some way peculiar—was Charlie Ford, the "bull-cook" in bunkhouse number one.

Charlie was always laughing, always joking, always ready to oblige. He furnished warm water for washing to those who owned wash-basins of their own, for ten cents a week. Yet there was one subject on which he spoke in allusions only; and that was money. "Thirty dollars a month for five months," he would say. "That isn't half enough for me."—"But it's all you get, isn't it?"—"Yes. Sure. That's what the company pays me."—"Well," Len said, "you make a little on the side, melting snow and selling hot water for washing and shaving."—"That's nothing," Charlie replied airily. "Cigarette money. No. I've two or three fellows working for me."—"How do you mean, working for you?"—"I mean what I say. They are my slaves. They work and gamble. I draw their pay and their winnings for them."—Len stared incredulously. "Go on. You are fooling."—"All right, kid, all right. Have it your way. You're innocent."

Everybody called Len "kid"; even Joseph had

taken the habit, in spite of the fact that Len was rapidly growing.

The second bunkhouse had a rather unsavoury reputation: that of a "rough-house," a den of gambling, vice, and iniquities. At first, that reputation had kept Len at a distance; but slowly all he heard gathered into an almost irresistible attraction—the attraction which hot, spicy, unclean things have for the unformed mind.

Yet, even about this attraction there was something higher. From all over the country these men had flowed together here; as if from many points of the compass strings were gathered and tied in a knot. When he followed one of these strings backward, out into the world, it led, often with many ramifications, to other knots, each representing a little world in which there were joys and sorrows, pleasures and worries, in which there was life. The distance became something which no longer seemed to be alien; it seemed no longer to be vaguely reposeful; it, too, pulsated, seethed, and throbbed with passions, feelings, thoughts. Len's old desire for book knowledge seemed strangely futile. Some conception arose in him of the web of events, each single one determining in some way many others; all being interrelated and woven into an inextricable mass. What is commonly called education seemed suddenly largely a matter of words.

All these men that surrounded him were uneducated; even the "boss"; and he liked them.

A new idea arose in him: the idea of "the world's work." That work was done by these men; and

they had no education; the one who presumably "had one," Bill Faryon, the filer who sharpened the saws at night, could not use it; what he needed was clever fingers, not a trained mind. A great doubt arose in Len. The general value placed on education seemed to be an imposition, a fraud.

As if to confirm him in this conviction, a young man appeared in camp shortly after Christmas. He did not mingle with the crews. He was the son of one of the owners, sent into camp to gain a practical insight into the workings of a lumber camp. He spent a week in each of the three establishments which the company operated within their timber lease.

This young man who had had all the opportunities which money could buy for him did not seem to be clever in speech or practical work. He tried his hand at every tool that was used; but the men laughed at him. The camp boss, though outwardly respectful enough, sometimes shot a quick glance at one of the "hands"—whenever the young Crœsus had uttered some egregious imbecility. Yet, without question he was accepted and spoken of as an educated man.

On the first day of his stay in camp, the boss brought him to the cook house to show him the arrangements there. "That's the kitchen, is it?" he asked, scarcely deigning to look at Len and the other cookies who stood lined up. "Are my meals prepared there, too? . . . No. Don't show me the beastly place. It would spoil my appetite."

An education seemed a mere bauble, to wave in

order to dazzle the common crowd which had not looked behind the scenes as he, Len, had done. Over against it stood Life, with a capital letter.

Soon after, he went one evening to the second bunkhouse.

It was a Saturday night, and not a few of its inmates had gone to "town," some of them walking, some riding the dray which was used to cart in the supplies. The remainder of the men were gathered in three groups. One, nearest the door, consisted of some ten or fifteen young fellows who were sitting on their bunks, nearly in the dark; when Len entered, they were listening to the teller of a story. A second group was gathered about an improvised table of planks placed crosswise over two bunks at the east end of the room; they were playing poker, for high stakes; and they had usurped about half of the lanterns available in the bunk-house. The dim light cast their tense and excited countenances into strong relief. They were alternately noisy and breathlessly quiet. Whenever anyone spoke singly, so that his words could be understood, his speech seemed to be interlarded with profanity. To Len's amazement Joseph was one of this group. The third crowd clustered more irregularly at the opposite end of the house. Dice claimed their attention.

Besides, two or three odd figures were dimly reclining alone in their bunks, in the half-light left between the two groups of gamblers.

As Len walked from place to place, his feet knocked against a whiskey bottle which went roll-

ing over the floor. At last, unseen, he stopped behind the first group, near the door.

The men assembled there had just burst into a roar of laughter.

"That reminds me," a voice said when the laughter subsided. "I was threshing out west last fall, near Cheval Mort. I was hauling wheat to town. It was ten miles to go; and whenever a fellow went to town over dinner time, the boss gave him a meal ticket so he could get his eats at a dinky little hotel. There was a pretty waitress there; Annie was her name. I never felt quite sure about her. Sometimes I thought a fellow stood all kinds of a chance. But, doggone it, I was never sure of the minx. Well, one day I came in, and Annie was gone. By jingo, I felt sorry. A mangy old hag came to wait on me. I ate my dinner, and when she brings me the coffee, I asks, kind of casual-like, Annie gone?—Yes, the old hag says. Got fired.—Well, I says, I'm sorry. Annie and I were pretty good friends. I am doggone sorry.—At that the old hag looks at me, kind of funny, with her eyes swimming, and says, I'm just as good as she. And I've the same number. Four, on the top floor."

Again a roar of laughter went up from the group. Len did not understand what they were laughing about.

"It goes to show!" said another voice. "It just goes to show! There ain't none of them. . . ."

"I cussed myself for a damn fool," the first voice said. "I'd hesitated and waited and missed my chance."

"But say," a third voice struck in, "did you take the hint? With the old one, I mean?"

"Sure," the first voice replied. "Surest thing you know. Put a towel over her face. The rest of her wasn't bad."

And a third roar of laughter drowned the voice.

Len felt hot and red; he turned away. "There ain't none of them," the fellow had said; that sentence he understood.

Unaccountably, he suddenly saw the serious and worried face of Mr. Crawford in his cottage on the burnt-over ridge.

He went on at random. Shortly he found himself standing at the improvised table at which the game of poker was going on. Right opposite him sat Joseph, but his eye was lowered, following something that was proceeding on the boards. The atmosphere was charged and tense. A word or two, snapped out, seemed to crackle with sparks of excitement, Joseph thumped the boards in front of him and roared out a word, breathless.

"I call you, you piker!" somebody said sharply.

Cards were flung down. Joseph's eye almost burst from its socket. He half rose from his seat and broke into a string of curses, in German. That moment his eye met Len's as it flickered erratically through the half-dark room. A change came over him; all his muscles relaxed. Then he rose altogether and left the table where some jeered at him while others merely frowned. He joined Len, took his arm, and led him to the door.

They were no sooner outside than Joseph, in a

voice of self-accusation and disgust, said, "I am a beast!"

They left the clearing of the camp and struck out into one of the familiar bush trails. It was pitch-dark; not a star flickered in the black vault overhead. A wind, strangely warm for the season, moaned and wailed through the aisles of the trees.

Joseph groaned. "Why don't you look after me?" he snarled at Len. "That's what I took you along for. I've gambled away two months' wages tonight. I could have bought another cow with the money. You're no good. It isn't enough that a man gets separated from wife and children, he must go to the devil besides. Ack!" he moaned. "If only I knew! If I'd only get a letter! Perhaps she thinks I am dead by this time. Perhaps she thinks it's best to take another man who can look after her!"

Thus he launched into another one of his interminable series of complaints and regrets; and Len listened with a new knowledge sprung from a new and immense curiosity about life.

Some time in February the whole crew became restless. They had been in the bush now for over three months, as effectually separated from those with whom they were affiliated in the outside world as if they had been behind the iron bars of a prison. Even among the older and steadier men this restlessness manifested itself in the hurry with which, on mail days, they rushed to the office after working hours. The younger men were inordinately impatient for Saturday to come around; the inclina-

tion to leave camp on Saturday night and to go to town became general.

Len had never felt any desire to go there; all he needed he could buy at the company's store in camp where prices were lower than in town. But in town there were strangers to be met; the stores with their hundreds of cases full of "soft" drinks seemed to exercise an irresistible attraction. Numbers of the men managed to get drunk there and even to smuggle whiskey back into the camp.

The only two who seemed to be quite unaffected by this restlessness were the camp boss and the head-cook. Even Archie and Bill Faryon succumbed to the impatience for their mail.

One Saturday night, right after quitting time, Joseph rushed into the kitchen, calling Len. "Come on," he said, grinning and shrugging with devilment. "I'm going to town. Come along. No time to wait for supper. We'll get in on the dray. Make quick. Ask the cook."

Somehow Len felt stampeded by Joseph's urgency. Had he stopped to think for a moment, he would have declined to go; and his refusal might have sobered Joseph. But before he was really aware of what he was doing, he was stammering out his demand for leave to the head-cook who stood by the range, his big tin ladle in one hand and poking with a long fork in a panful of meat with the other.

The tall, evil-looking man did not at once answer. But suddenly he turned about, touched Len's head playfully with the greasy bowl of his

ladle, and said, "Sure. Run along, kid. If it gives you pleasure."

The fact was, Len had never before asked for any such privileges; all others had; and the work in the kitchen was always light on Saturday nights.

In less than a minute Len was running across to the stable, shouldering into his mackinaw coat. Joseph was already calling to him from the dray to which two young fellows were hitching a team of horses.

The camp boss passed and stopped. Following some impulse of which he felt half ashamed, Len eclipsed himself in the dark behind Joseph's back.

"Ken," said the camp boss, dimly seen in the light of the stars.

"Yes, sir."

"You're responsible for the team. No galloping, you understand?"

"I'll be responsible," Kenneth answered. "Never fear, boss."

The camp boss went on.

Five minutes later the vehicle threaded the chasm of the bush road. Thirty or forty men had crowded on to the dray. Len and Joseph were fortunate in having found sitting room. Most of the men stood up; and whenever the driver saw his chance, he made his team jump, so that half a dozen or more of them tumbled off. Then he trotted his horses swiftly along, leaving those who had dropped off behind where they swore at him or begged him to wait. Those who had managed to hold on laughed; shouts and imprecations rang out into the still

night like so many profanations. There was a faint light by this time from the rising moon.

In about two hours they came upon the little town which Len had not seen since he had first alighted from the train. It presented, apart from the fact that it was night this time, a very different picture; for many men had arrived before them from the other two camps.

At two or three points of the long triangle which had the station for its base and the bush, with the two stores embedded in it, for its sides, while at its apex stood the unpainted boarding house built of raw, sappy lumber, fires were burning about which groups of men stood or squatted, talking or listening.

To the left lay the large store, brilliantly lighted by gasoline lamps; to the right, the smaller store, also lighted, though with an inferior brilliancy, coal-oil being used there. Even from every window of the boarding house lights shone forth into the moon-lit, snow-floored woods.

When they had alighted, Joseph and Len stood for a moment forlornly alone. In sudden glee Joseph nudged Len and said, "Come on."

They went to the larger store and entered.

The inside of the vast, low room was crowded with men, nearly all of them young, who chattered, laughed, and pushed and crowded each other. Two boys and a girl of twelve or fourteen were slipping through the throng, flushed, and trying to keep up with the orders for "soft" drinks. A counter ran around three sides of the room; behind it, cases filled

with bottles were piled high. A broad-shouldered, short, bearded man and, opposite, his wife, a towering woman, were stolidly handing out the bottles by the half dozen. The atmosphere reeked with sweaty exhalations, smoke, and heat.

Joseph stopped one of the boys and purchased two bottles from him; they contained a bright-green, poisonous-looking liquid. He took two straws from a vase-like vessel on the counter and handed one of them to Len; when he removed the caps with the help of a key, the liquid burst into violent foam and spilled copiously on the floor.

Joseph's expression was that of a smiling embarrassment, ready to break into giggles; he enjoyed merely being in a crowd.

Len tasted the contents of his bottle, pursing his mouth in disgust. For a moment he looked away; and when he turned back, Joseph had disappeared from his side. Len retreated to the door and poured the remainder of the liquid into the snow.

When he re-entered, he placed the empty bottle on the counter and squeezed through to the back of the room where he found Joseph in a group of men who were making fun of him. Feeling half responsible for the man, he stepped up and pulled him by his sleeve. But Joseph scowled and shook him off. The two by Joseph's sides took him by one arm each and triumphantly marched him to the door, swearing that they would make him "perform."

Len did not know what to do with himself. He went out into the night and lingered, feeling miserable. He went to the shed behind the store where

the horses were tied. There he strolled from beast to beast and patted them on rumps, necks, and noses. While he did so, three young fellows entered, peered about, and swore. "Drat him!" one of them said. "He ain't here yet. What ails him? Run into some mounties?" They turned away.

Len also issued forth again, into the triangle in front of the stores. There he approached one of the fires, with its group of listening loafers. He spent an hour or so at the edge of the crowd, listening with the rest. By that time he was in a queer state of mind. His eyes had been opened with regard to vast realms of knowledge which had so far been closed to him. It was not book-knowledge; it was knowledge of the nether realms of life. Yet this new knowledge did not make him glad; it made him feel guilty. At a given stage of the proceedings whiskey had suddenly appeared in the various groups; and most of the men had imbibed pretty freely.

In a sort of disconsolate exhilaration he turned back with a sudden thought of Joseph. Over the whole triangle he went from fire to fire, looking for the man. Thus he came to its apex where, behind a screen of bare poplar trees, the boarding house stood to the left. Sharp shadows patterned the snow in black and white.

Startlingly Charlie Ford, the bull-cook, came running around a corner and stopped, espying Len. "Hello, kid," he said pleasantly. "Looking for your pardner?"

"Yes."

"He's in there, stewed," Charlie said, pointing

to the boarding house. "Some fellows having their fun with him. Walk right in. It's a public place."

Hesitatingly Len went to the door and opened it. It led into a large hall fitted as a dining room. Laughter greeted him. Somebody jumped up, took his arm, and marched him forward into a narrow corridor behind the hall. From an open door at its end shrieks and shouts rang forth. The man who had taken his arm, pushed him forward.

Within the room, the most striking sight was a woman dressed in a loose, glossy, pink wrap which left her arms and her bosom bare. She was struggling against a man who, seated in a chair, held her down on his knees. Two or three young fellows and as many girls—the latter in similar attire as the big woman—were looking on and laughing.

At that moment the man in the chair began to tickle the woman in order to break her resistance. She bent forward with a scream; and Len suddenly saw the man's face, flushed with unholy excitement, its eyes glazed with drink. It was Joseph's.

Len veered and slipped out. As soon as he was in the open, he turned north and started afoot on his sixteen-mile tramp back to camp.

Chapter II

CORRESPONDENCE

MEANWHILE Len had written and received a number of letters.

He had written to his mother, telling her not to worry about him; and she had answered giving him the news of the settlement: once or twice a week his stepfather and Charlie went to town, with two teams, taking between them three cords of wood which brought three dollars a cord; the money thus earned was being laid by for the purchase of seed-grain; Willy Hausman and his father had gone south, to the margin of the Big Marsh where they, too, worked in the bush, for a Swede by name of Niels Lindstedt; Mr. Jackson was at Minor where he had found inside work at his old trade as a plasterer; Helen Dick's father had gone to the city and was working in a meat-packing plant. Thus the little settlement at Macdonald School was trying to weather the disastrous year which had made everybody poor.

To Mr. Crawford, Len had despatched four heavy letters, holding each, besides a brief report about his personal well-being, many sheets of closely-written compositions; most of them, up to Christmas, being summaries of what he had read; though the longest of them all, the last one, had

dealt with the camp and what he had seen and learned there.

Mr. Crawford had answered all but this last one by brief notes. The account of the camp, however, sent some time early in February, brought a longer and more detailed comment.

"Your composition," the teacher wrote, "swarms with mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. These are defects which you could readily remedy if you had another year or so of schooling. Don't let such trifles discourage you. I want to say emphatically that your description of the camp and its inmates is such as to convey a picture more vivid than it is given to many a professional writer to draw. Behind the letter-page there arises a view into that rectangular clearing with its radiating roads, its long, low log buildings, and its seething population —a view which, though I hesitate saying it, compels me to say that your gifts are the very exceptional ones of him who is born with the seeing eye."

Len read and reread this letter; and it gave him a feeling of a strange exhilaration; as if he must step before some altar and offer vows to the All-Highest. But this feeling wore off and was at last lost in an almost ironical and yet half compassionate attitude towards the grey-beard in the cottage at home.

In him, a development was being accomplished which led him away from studies and academic ambitions. This development was fostered by his correspondence with Lydia. Her letters also he read and reread many times till he knew them almost by

heart. When he was engaged in his homely work, setting the tables or peeling potatoes or scraping roots, incomplete phrases would float to the surface of his mind—phrases which he felt such an overpowering desire to complete that at last he went out under some pretext to take the letter in which they occurred from his pocket and to glance it over. By and by, as the winter rolled on, he came to distinguish three clearly demarcated phases in the girl's attitudes.

He had no names for them; or he might have called the first the romantic stage. "Just think," Lydia wrote. "Here I am sitting down to write to my lover from whom I am separated because he has gone to foreign parts. A few weeks ago we met in the bush. Do you remember the tree trunk, Len, on which we used to sit? We were children, Len. Children. Is not that fallen tree trunk something wonderful for you now? It is for me. I wonder whether you feel as much older as I do than when I saw you last. We were close together, sitting on that trunk; and we had nothing to say to each other. We blushed when we touched. Now I could almost wish we were separated by an ocean. Don't you think the longing of one lover for another is the sweetest thing in all the world? Much sweeter than their actual meeting? I do. If all went smoothly, I should not care for love. What I like best is to dream of you."

The letter from which this was an extract was written in answer to one of Len's which, to his thoughtful retrospection, seemed utterly prosaic,

stiff, and juvenile. He had asked her a number of matter-of-fact questions. Not one of these was answered. Nor was a question asked with regard to the material side of his life.

At first Len felt disappointed. Then the flights of her fancy intoxicated him. He felt shallow as compared with her. He tried to visualise her as she had been sitting in that big, prosperous house of her employer when she wrote to him. He saw her in an attic room, writing at a little table pushed close to the window so as to catch the light of a waning day. Her eyes were wide with dreams. Yes, he was shallow. It was she who gave colour to the visions of the past. A new world seemed to open: the world of a fanciful play on sentiment and sensation. Little was needed to open that world to him: he was a reader. His next letter to her swarmed with quotations. "The course of true love never did run smooth." At first it sounded false to him; it did not closely coincide with his feeling; it was like superimposing intricate embroidery on a plain cloth. But the very depth and truth of his feeling made him wish above all to please her. He span himself into an artificial world; it gave him delights he had not known. That had been before he had turned away from his books.

The curious thing was that at the very moment when he had fully imbued himself with this mood Lydia had already outgrown it.

This time he had asked no questions; but her letter consisted of answers to such as he might have asked. Had Len been critically trained, he might

have called this her worldly phase. "You know, Len," she wrote, "the Smiths are wealthy. Mrs. Smith has been an invalid for a number of years. Since the birth of her last baby, a month ago—it died within a week—she has been quite unable to walk; she is now wheeled about in a chair. The doctor says it is inflammatory rheumatism. In addition to myself, there is now a nurse in the house: an ugly old woman. She does nothing except look after Mrs. Smith. Money means nothing here. Mr. Smith is the man to do everything in the most handsome way. He goes to town a good deal, often staying away for a whole day or longer; and Mrs. Smith is much alone. On Sundays, many people call. The women, or the ladies, I believe I should say, sit with Mrs. Smith; the men stand about in the yard or in the stables, smoking and talking; and the young people come to the kitchen to visit. There are three or four young men who, I believe, are in love with me. They ask me to come for a walk or a ride with them. You understand, of course, that I do not go. I tell them that I am no longer heart-free and that my love is engaged elsewhere. They try to joke and to get the name of the lucky one. I tell them that my knight is far away and will be one of the great on earth. They laugh at that; but I look scornfully down on them till they feel small though they would never acknowledge it."

This letter and others like it filled Len with a vague uneasiness. The village where she lived had always seemed to him to be a superior sort of place. It had the glamour which, to the dweller in the bush,

surrounds all denser congregations of men. Age brings to any settlement on the plains an appearance of prosperity which may be very deluding. Prosperity imparts to a district an air of civilisation and culture which, be it ever so superficial, awes those whose lot remains poverty. The few children from Odensee whom he had known as a boy had been ready at repartee: they had used stereotyped forms of speech, slang phrases which, though they indicate the very reverse, namely a lack of real originality and thought, have for him who hears them for the first time the great impressiveness of genuine wit, testifying to an agility of the mind which seems marvellous. It was very disquieting to think that Lydia was surrounded by such a worldly, accomplished atmosphere. Life in the village seemed to be something less serious, something more frivolous than life in the bush. Len was singularly and not altogether joyfully affected by such expressions as "I am no longer heart-free"—"my love is engaged." They seemed to be a little too fluent to agree with the tense seriousness of his own sentiments. They sounded as if she were displaying to the world what she should have hidden in her heart. Nevertheless, to appease the anguish of his soul, he adopted her phraseology.

But already, had he seen things more clearly, that would have been vain. For in February the third phase of her growth unfolded itself. Had he known the world, he might have called it the materialistic phase. "Len," she wrote, "I am glad I had this chance to go to Odensee. I begin to consider my stay

here as no more than a stepping-stone to better things. If you achieve your ambition, I want to be worthy of you. I lose no opportunity of preparing myself for a wider life. Mrs. Smith, I am glad to say, is very helpful. She has lived in the city; and she has taken a liking to me. I can hardly understand any longer how I ever stayed at home so long. Father fetched me last Sunday; he was at home himself for three days. I must say the house in the bush looks unbearably cramped and poverty-stricken. I could hardly endure it after what I had been used to here. Both father and mother are terribly old-fashioned, though I hope to educate mother to saner views. They objected to my using a little powder on my face. Father was worse than mother. He even made sarcastic remarks about the dress I wore. I had made it myself, from an old dress of Mrs. Smith's. I think it very pretty, of black sateen, with trimmings of cream-coloured Japanese silk. Imagine that mother asked me for money! Well, I made it clear that I mean to have my earnings for myself. I did not tell her that, since Christmas, my pay has been doubled; which is only right, of course, for I do all the work now. I did not tell mother, either, that I have bought myself a complete new dress of navy-blue taffeta for which I paid fifteen dollars. I ordered it from the R. S. Paterson company in the city, through their catalog.

"Mr. Smith is very very nice to me. On my birthday, three weeks ago, he gave me ten dollars extra, besides a gold locket. I have not mentioned a word of that at home. I believe there would have been a

row about it. They will have to get used to my new ways first. As it was, father wanted me to stay at home; but mother stepped in and talked him out of that. I told her I should run away. I hate the bush and the hard life there. Mr. Smith told me one day that thirty years ago, when he was a young fellow, his farm had also been all bush. Even now we are only a few miles from its edge. But, of course, it has long since been all cleared. There are only a few trees about the yard; and they are planted ones. Don't you think planted trees ever so much nicer? Mr. Smith says I am quite right in hating the bush. A pretty girl like myself, he says, should not think of living there. I believe it was just the least bit naughty of him to say that. He likes to pay compliments. But when I talked of the city he laughed. I wonder what he meant; he would not tell me. I believe he wants to keep me here. But he is very jolly. He always pumps the water and carries it into the house; and the two twins, Alvin and Ivan, must fill the wood-box for me. I have more work now in other ways. I don't think Mr. Smith is much younger than father; but he is not half so old-fashioned. He likes to joke and to be pleasant. If he were not married and had no children, he would be just like the other young fellows who say they are in love with me. He knows, of course, of our engagement."

This letter and others like it troubled Len much more than he cared to acknowledge. So far, Lydia had been something removed from all earthly experience. His realisation of her had been something

spiritual, almost mystical: like the vision of the unicorn in the enchanted leafless forest. Whenever he visualised her, he saw the edge of a thin dress under a white throat rising and falling with the rhythm of her breath; or golden glimmers in flaxen hair over the nape of a translucent neck, with the striped shadows of white aspen boles flitting over it in the bush. Things sweet and incomprehensible surged through him then. She had been an ideal, apart from cares and desires.

It was characteristic that his first realisation of a common humanity between them should have arisen out of her letters to him. He was on the threshold of a discovery which eluded him. That discovery was of the fact that she was not a mere projection of the vague stirrings in himself; that she led a life of her own over which he had no control; or rather, that he had seen in her so far only that projection of his vague stirrings to which no reality could correspond.

A new picture intruded; the concrete picture of an individuality discovering herself through no contact with him. This new picture disturbed him in two ways: he regretted the loss of his dream of her; and he wished to know more and more about her as she really was. He felt that he did not know her at all. At the same time he was conscious that in this new curiosity about her there was something less exalted than there had been in his old dream of her. As she revealed herself in her letters, and as, simultaneously, his knowledge of the world widened

out, a new, carnal, and jealous element stole into his thought of her, intensely disquieting.

A great impatience took hold of him. When, of an afternoon, during those hours when he had formerly studied and read, he was alone in the dining room of the cook house, he walked up and down, flooded by wellings-up within him of vague fears and incomprehensible forebodings. He wanted to go home and be near the girl; for she was his.

His new knowledge, gained in the camp, made him see dangers to his future. He reached the point where, in walking up and down, he raised clenched fists to ceiling or sky; and his thin face was set with painful efforts at subduing his agitation. He tried to make things clear to himself; and he arrived merely at a feeling of impotent, helpless exasperation: a resentment against being imprisoned by circumstance. The very sight of the camp became unbearable to him: it seemed to mean an identification of man with Joseph and with all the iniquities which he half divined in the constitution of things male. He could have started out walking to get to the girl.

His impatience was bound up with his realisation in Lydia of a separate entity, a being different from the one he had thought her to be. What he had thought to be love, ardent adoration, the presentiment of heavenly mysteries to be revealed at some future time, a deification of things within himself, gave way to passion. That she was different from what he had thought her seemed to make her all the more desirable, making it imperative that the mys-

teries between them should be revealed at a nearer date, soon, now!

Powder? One day he took a little flour into the wash-room and rubbed it on his face, in front of the distorting mirror there. He discovered that hair had begun to sprout on his chin and lips!

To see her, to feel her touch!

He became wistful and tried to visualise her as she was, in her silks, with powder on her face. If this was love, it was a scourge!

Money! She spent on herself what she earned. He had bought a single pair of shoes at the company store; and the price was charged against his wages. Apart from that, he had not spent a cent! How different from him Lydia must be! But even that seemed a charm now that her transformation in his thought of her became complete.

One day he asked the camp boss when the camp would break up.

"Getting home-sick?" the older man asked. "Hard to tell. It depends on the weather. About the twenty-fifth." It was the second of March.

From that moment on Len counted the days, glad with every morning's five-o'clock bell that the tale of those which remained was diminished by another unit.

Chapter III

RETURN AND DECISION

WHEN the four o'clock night train, south bound, pulled into McDougall, Kolm was there with his sleigh to take Len home. The greeting, on the pitch-dark platform, was of the briefest. Kolm and Len shook hands and said, "Hello!" That was all. Joseph had also alighted; but he neither smiled nor spoke. He merely nodded—a greeting lost in the gloom of night. A few minutes later they pulled away from the station, Joseph and Len sitting side by side in the box.

The going was heavy; for most of the snow had melted, and the resulting mud was only slightly frozen over, so that the runners cut deep ruts into the surface of the road.

Len felt strange. Between him and his stepfather there was something new; he had felt it in the handshake with which he had been greeted. His stepfather acknowledged him as a man.

"Well," Kolm said to Joseph, "Len stuck it out."

"Yah," Joseph replied with perfect indifference.

There was silence again; the sleigh was grinding through marly mud or gliding smoothly over remnants of snow-drifts.

"Well," Kolm said at last, "that should help.

You've got no debts. You must have a hundred and fifty dollars clear."

"I should," Joseph said dully.

"Len sent a hundred and forty-three dollars home."

"He got his."

"Didn't you?"

"No."

"You don't mean to say that they didn't pay you?"

"They paid me all right."

"Well . . ."

"He gambles," Len said briefly.

Kolm, without speaking, whistled through his teeth.

Len thought of Charlie Ford. "I've got two or three fellows working for me. I draw their pay."

They drove for an hour, Kolm wrestling with what he had heard. "Do you mean to say you've no money left from the winter's work?"

"Not a cent," Joseph said without looking up into the grey dawn from where he sat, his knees drawn up, his back humped against the side of the sleigh-box.

Kolm laughed. "Well," he said, "I'll be jiggered!"

They made two turns. Len was half asleep. Daylight came.

"I see Schmidt's up," Kolm said. He disdained pronouncing the name in the English fashion. "I think I want to see him for a moment."

Len sat up and looked at his stepfather who winked at him.

Just beyond the corner of the school they entered a yard.

"Hello," Kolm said; Smith came from the stable to meet them.

"Hello!" Smith was in overalls and did not look so dapper now as when he went visiting or to town.

"Got any seed-wheat left?"

"A little. But I want cash. Three dollars a bushel."

"How much have you got?"

"Forty or fifty bushels."

"All right," Kolm said, nudging Len with his foot. "I'll take forty bushels. Will you hold them for me?"

"Sure."

Len had half raised himself, looking towards the house. There, in the backdoor, a young lady had appeared, dressed in light-coloured gingham, with a white dusting-cap on her head. It took him several seconds before he recognised her.

Lydia, too, stared at him. Her lips parted and broke into a peculiar smile the exact shade of which it would have been hard to define.

Len's heart went pounding. He rose to his feet and vaulted over the side of the sleigh-box. A moment later he stood in front of the girl who was still smiling her rigid smile. She merely touched his hand.

"Come in," she whispered as she recovered herself and turned back into the kitchen.

Len followed.

But she had stopped just inside the door.

Trembling all over, he reached for her with both his hands. But she caught his wrists and held him back. "Not here!" she said.

"Lydia!"

"Two weeks from Sunday! Then I'll be home for the day. Not here!"

Unaccountably sobered, Len stood before her. "Are you . . ." he stammered. "Are you going to stay at home?"

"No," she replied with recovered composure. "I'll stay here for the summer. I'll be home for the day only. You come to the house."

"All right." Len was still trembling.

"You have grown," Lydia smiled with a touch of archness.

"So have you."

"I!" She shrugged her shoulders. "I've grown fat, that is all. I used to be taller than you; you are half a head taller than I am now."

"Well . . ."

"Till two weeks from Sunday."

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

Again they touched hands. Disappointed, Len turned to the door. But, in a sudden impulse, retaining him, she lifted her lips to his. His knees almost giving way, he bent and kissed her; and with a disconcertingly feline grace she rubbed her cheek against his.

A moment later Len rejoined the group at the sleigh.

"Won't you come in and have breakfast?" Smith was saying.

"No, thanks," Kolm replied.

But Joseph rose. "I'll stay if I may."

"Sure."

"I've got to find work," Joseph said gloomily to Kolm by way of explanation as he climbed to the ground.

Kolm nodded, clicked his tongue, and turned his horses.

As they were driving along again, Kolm, too, sat down, looking at Len out of his cavernous eyes.

Being immersed in thought, Len did not notice it. He had been away for five months; and in the interval the world had changed. He found it hard to fit himself back into his old surroundings. Lydia was like a stranger to him. Yet he had kissed her! He himself had changed, of course. But he hardly knew how much. It was most disturbing to find that his memory picture of those whom he had left behind did no longer tally with the realities. The world was in a flux. The very foundations of life seemed to rock.

Out of this new, strange world, came Kolm's voice. "Potatoes are two and a quarter in the city."

It took Len several minutes before he saw the relevancy of the remark. When he did, he said quaintly, "I still have that dollar."

They went on and on and reached the Mac-

donald grade. Keeping in the edge of the bush, for the grade was bare of snow, they turned east.

As they passed the school and, north of it, Jackson's farm, Kolm nodded across the road and said, "Dick's home. I guess times are hard for city folk, too." Dick was Mr. Jackson's oldest son, a travelling salesman of whom a strange story was told.

When Mr. Jackson had been left a widower, twenty years ago, he had advertised in an English paper for a housekeeper fond of children, hinting at ultimate intentions of marriage. He had been living in the Minor district at the time, six miles from town. The younger boys had been mere children. He picked a girl from the two or three who had applied and sent the money for her passage out. She had come; and when she was expected to arrive at Minor, he had sent Dick with the buggy to fetch her. For a day or so Dick had not returned; and when he did come home, he had introduced the lady by his side as his wife. Finding her young and good to look at, he had persuaded her that his father was much too old for her; and she had been willing to marry the son of the man who had paid for her passage. But retribution had followed quickly. She, not knowing the country, had, during the winter, gone driving by herself, dressed in clothes much too light. She had encountered a blizzard and lost the road. When she was found, both her feet had had to be amputated; and Dick who moved into the city had since had a crippled wife at his house. She walked on wooden stumps; and they had no children.

Len did not know Dick; but he had heard something of his reputation which was not of the best. Yet, what did it matter to him?

When they passed Hausman's place, Kolm spoke for the third time. "I don't think Fred's going to make it after all."

"He was working out, was he not?"

"Yah. But he could not stand it. He's got a weak back. He's proved up and mortgaged his place. I don't think there was always bread in the house last winter."

Len felt immensely depressed.

Another two miles; and, with the sun warming the air, they swung up on the grade, just as a boy who looked strangely tall and strong issued from the house beyond. Len raised himself to his knees.

"That isn't Charlie?"

"You bet," Kolm replied.

Len leaned over the side of the box as the boy came running.

"By golly!" Charlie exclaimed with a swagger. "If it isn't Len!"

Len had tears in his eyes. But he controlled his voice. "Going to school?" he asked.

"Sure," Charlie replied. "Where else? Though I don't have to go."

"Well," Len went on, his manner almost paternal, "don't talk nonsense. Run along, you scamp!"

"See you later!" Charlie said airily and strode off.

Then the vehicle stopped in the yard. The backdoor of the house opened, and a fat, flabby woman, grey of skin, and wrinkled before her time, stood

in its frame, wiping her eyes with the corner of an apron.

Len alighted and ran up to her; she was barefooted and did not come through the mud to meet him; but when he reached her, she fell on his neck and sobbed. Len felt embarrassed; and as soon as she released him, he turned away and helped his stepfather to unhitch.

When they re-entered the house, Len seemed to miss something; and suddenly he asked, "Where is the baby?"

His mother stood bent over the stove, arrested in her movement.

Kolm cleared his throat; but it was half a minute before he said, "The poor little beggar died at Christmas. We thought it would be useless to worry you."

A little over two weeks went by. Len fitted himself back into this world. Kolm had given him an account of how his money had been spent, handing him twenty-five dollars to keep; he was accepted on a new footing.

On the third Sunday after his return, Len went in the afternoon to call at the Hausman homestead.

The fact that he made this a formal call was significant; in times past he would have dropped in on a week-day and in his working clothes. This time, looking forward to the occasion, he had gone to town on Saturday, the first time he had ever done so on his own account, taking a cream can to the station and then going to a store in order to spend part of the money which his stepfather had returned

to him out of his earnings. He had never yet had a Sunday suit. On Sundays, both he and Charlie had worn a newer suit of working clothes; but now he had bought himself that Sunday suit.

Walking along the grade, he presented an appearance unusual for him. To town or city people he would have looked grotesque. His suit, of a heather-grey mixture of cotton and wool, ill-fitting and stiff with newness, was too ostensibly worn as a symbol of budding prosperity; his striped shirt and the stiff celluloid collar about his neck, with a plaid-pattern sateen tie, were too unmistakably causing him acute discomfort; and his high-toed shoes, at two and a half dollars wartime price, were too palpably ephemeral and unserviceable on a rock-strewn grade of the wilderness. He was self-conscious and appeared to advantage to no eye except his mother's, and enviable only to Charlie.

Mr. Hausman, a tall, sallow-skinned, pock-marked man of forty, had come home a few weeks ago: the work in the bush had proved too heavy for him.

The children, Ernest and Aleck, little Lena and Dolly, the baby, were playing about in yard and stable.

So, when Len entered the two-roomed house, he found none but man and wife and their daughter Lydia assembled in the kitchen. Mrs. Hausman was a very short, very fat woman who, though her family had not increased for two or three years, was always with child; she was friendly and pleasant and bustled about in ostentatious hospitality.

Both parents considered Len's call as an honour; and both saw instantly the significance of his appearance. Had he dropped in in a casual way, in his working clothes, they would have taken his call for no more than a neighbourly friendliness; they would have talked of the weather and the winter that had gone by, in the manner peculiar to farmers all over the world. As it was, his call admitted of one interpretation only: he was formally asking to be admitted as the accepted suitor for the hand of their oldest daughter.

Len's self-consciousness arose from the fact that he was fully aware of this. His stepfather had enlightened him as to his prospective ownership of half the parental farm. When his real father had died, the homestead, just ready to be "proved up" —for in the bush the possession of a given number of cattle was accepted as equivalent to so much breaking—had fallen to his mother as her natural inheritance; had it been "patented" at the time of her second marriage, it would have remained her legitimate marriage portion. But, since it was still registered as crown land at the time, it was reserved for the two children from her first marriage, with all the improvements made on the place. Anything added to these improvements, in breaking or building, became at once part and parcel of the inheritance of the boys. Kolm, in other words, was working for Charlie and Len. The point was that he had no choice in the matter. For, had he left the place to work his own claim, adjoining the farm, the im-

plement companies would at once have seized the equipment which he needed to carry on his work.

Len, then, was heir to a property unencumbered by debt. He was a more desirable son-in-law than any other young man of the district; and the Hausmans as well as other people, everybody, in fact, except Len and Charlie themselves, had always known this.

Lydia, on the other hand, was portionless. Though she might in time lay by some small sum by saving her wages as a domestic servant, she would always, economically, remain Len's inferior. Were she married to him, however, her help on the farm would enable her husband to create capital by clearing land while she made the living for him and herself and a possible family; cows and chickens are the staple stand-by of the pioneer during the first ten years on new land.

Thus, when Len entered, both parents rose and shook him solemnly by the hand. Lydia who was sitting at the table looked up and smiled. It was clear that she, too, knew what Len's appearance signified.

Len nodded to her and reddened. He had been half aware of the meaning that would attach to his call when he had bought the clothes in which he made it. The trouble was that, at a glance, he divined that, in Lydia's eyes, he played a slightly ridiculous part. The village boys at Odensee, could outdo him in this business of "dressing-up."

He had also, at a glance, seen something of the girl's own appearance. She was clad in a navy-blue

silk gown—it was that fifteen dollar purchase of hers of which she had written to him; and, being cut low at the neck, it left the upper part of her white bosom bare. A little gold locket dangled there, suspended by a chain of incredible thinness. Her very light-coloured hair was done up loosely, with waves and curls in it. The skin of her face was of velvety smoothness; her lips, like a scarlet flower on snow-white silk. Her eyes had the blue of the violet of the woods, liquid, transparent, with backgrounds of deeper blue behind. But what struck him more than anything else, so much so that, after a first, fleeting glance, his eye returned to them for a second glimpse, was her arms: long, slender arms, almost thin, and encased, with a most alluring effect, in tight sleeves of shiny dark silk from which her hands issued like pink petals; and these arms rested with their pointed elbows on the oil-cloth of the table, her hands being loosely joined, with her chin leaning on the knuckle of an index finger bent upward. Altogether she presented a picture which took his breath away; for some time he dared not look at her again.

Lydia had specially dressed for Len. Not that she did not dress in the same way for others in the village. But she would not have dared to appear thus under the parental roof. She had brought her things in a borrowed suitcase and shown them to her mother, telling her that she expected Len and hinting at further developments. She could not have used powder and rouge had she not first won over

her mother into compliance. Her mother had spoken to her father, alone.

By dint of avoiding to turn his eyes in her direction, Len recovered his composure to the point where he could respond to the conversation which developed as he took the chair offered to him.

The room contained a small cast-iron cook-stove, a table, a bench, four chairs, a few shelves for the dishes, and a box on which stood a water pail. The rough log walls were white-washed; the raw plank floor, painstakingly scrubbed—a fact which was all the more conspicuous for the few muddy foot-prints on it. The door to the bed-room which was crowded with four bedsteads stood open.

The conversation limped along, concerned, first with the weather and the prospects for seeding, then with Len's stay in the lumber camp. It he described at length, a task in which he excelled and which relieved him of his self-consciousness.

Then, suddenly, he blushed, for he saw Mrs. Hausman nudge her husband, just when he was on the point of asking some further question, for Hausman was inclined to listen at length.

"Well, yah, all right," he stammered, noting the broad nod of his wife towards the bed-room, and rose. He stretched with exaggerated ostentation, to show how tired he was, and said, "I guess I'll have a snooze. You too?"

His wife rose at once and bustled about at the stove. "I guess so," she said. "We'll have a nap. Lydia will entertain you, Len. When we get up,

we'll have a cup of coffee. I'll put the kettle on the stove."

The pretext was too transparent not to call up a second blush in Len's face; and the blush deepened when, in his embarrassment, he cast a quick glance at Lydia and saw her ironical smile.

To give the girl "her chance," the parents retired, after having shouted strict injunctions to the smaller children in the yard not to come into the house to disturb. When Mrs. Hausman followed her husband into the bed-room, she drew the door discreetly shut.

For a minute or two Len and Lydia sat in a tense silence. While the parents had been present, neither had spoken to the other. That fact seemed to consolidate into an almost opaque presence which held them apart.

At last Lydia rose, went past the table to the little square window in the south wall of the house, and looked out into the yard. Then, humming a tune, she returned to her seat. Her movement seemed to intensify the silence.

Len had followed her with his eyes, averting them when she, in returning, cast a glance at him and smiled. Her step had been light and tripping, as if she had no weight. Len's embarrassment was gone; but his brain was hard at work, trying to formulate a change in her of which he was conscious and which had burst upon him the moment he had seen her on the morning of his return.

The silence lengthened. It became like a bubble which is being blown, growing, stretching the film of soapy water, iridescent in the fine, wavy, and

trembling colours of the rainbow, and imparting to both—but more to him than to her—the feeling of an increasing tension as, mentally, they regarded it, in fear of the moment when it would burst.

At last Len spoke. He did not look at her as he did so; he was intent only on finding the exact expression for the change which he had observed. His words seemed hardly to be addressed to her.

"Under the eaves of our sheep shed," he said, "there hangs a pupa, attached to the boards by a fine, thin stalk. It is greyish brown and quite plain. It looks like the wood and has been there since last fall. Inside of it something is growing; and soon it will burst its shell. It will be a butterfly, checkered in gold and black."

Lydia listened. While he spoke, the tension seemed to increase for her, whereas for him it decreased. Her eyes serious and wondering, she looked at him, seeing his profile with peaked nose and pointed chin. His head was bent forward, his mouth twisted sideways with the intensity of his thought. It was a new sight to her, and yet not new; for it reminded her of him as he had been in the classroom of the school where he had always sat alone because he had outstripped his fellow pupils. And as she looked, the bubble seemed to grow till its tension became painful.

He ceased; but she still looked at him, with eyes wide and deeply blue. Whatever he might wish to convey was not the sort of nonsense she was accustomed to from the lips of other boys. A month ago this difference would still have made him appear

less attractive to her; now she forgot that his clothes were laughable.

His head moved, and he looked full into her eyes. Little ripples of expectation ran along her spine. And then the bubble burst, precipitating her into a strange confusion of feelings.

"That is you," he said. "While you were at home, you were the pupa. You have burst your shell and become a butterfly."

Nobody had ever spoken to her like that. Had she felt critical, she would probably have laughed. This was so ponderous, far-fetched, round-about. The point was that she did not feel the least inclined to be critical. She felt frightened. She had consented to see him, had played with the idea of seeing him again as a child plays with the idea of destroying a valuable toy. In her late thoughts of him he had figured as a strangely rustic being, scarcely human; he had been identified with the bush; and she hated the bush. Yet, in the eyes of her parents, a more or less definite engagement with him, to be broken at will, would cover up a multitude of sins. Now she saw that she would not be able to play with him; at this moment he exercised an almost supreme power over her. She wished she were able to wipe out the last few months and give herself unreservedly to him.

He rose. "Lydia," he said, "I am much changed; and so are you. We have both seen something of the world; though I doubt whether you have seen as much as I. Girls don't, I believe." He stopped and looked at her, a vague expression in his eyes.

She was afraid he would touch her. This was one of the supreme moments of her life. Girls don't, she thought; and in confusion she answered. "They do."

Suddenly, as he looked down on her, he saw in her once more the shy, trembling child whom he had kissed in the bush. He came close to the table, drew his chair up, and sat down opposite her. His arm rested on the table; his look seemed to be turned inward; by a mere chance his hand touched hers.

Even as it happened, she tried to prevent it but could not. Tears filled her eyes and made her angry at herself.

A vague gesture of his seemed to embrace the world. "I wish I could tell you! Girls do, you say. I don't believe it. I can't. If they did, they would curse the beast in man. Somewhere is paradise; but all about is hell. And those who live in hell, since they can't enter paradise, throw at least brands of the fire of their torment into it. I have looked into that hell. But to me, where you are, is Eden."

The girl listened, half comprehending, half unconscious of what he said. She was torn between two desires: the desire to rend the veil of this boy's illusions and to stand revealed; and the desire to envelop him in deception, to shield him from knowledge, to protect his picture of her from profanation. She was suddenly inclined to quarrel with fate. Why had he gone? Would she have stayed even though she had known what would happen? She saw the picture of herself as she had been. No.

What she had been, she would not want to be again even though she might be what he thought her.

"Lydia," he went on. "I have seen a good deal; I have thought even more. My conclusions would startle Mr. Crawford."

That name came like balm. To her Mr. Crawford was a kindly but laughable figure. At thought of him she could smile.

"Ambition!" Len said. "In years past I thought I should like to be a teacher; and perhaps I should like it still. But no longer because it would move me up into a higher sphere. It would simply be easier for me than farming. Money? Why, money!" he exclaimed with a gesture of fine contempt.

Lydia looked up, cool and ironical. "I want lots of money!"

"Lydia, listen," he pleaded with sudden passion. "Suppose I were a well-to-do farmer. I work all day. At night I come home. What should I find in the house? What should I be looking for but you? Now suppose I am poor and live on a homestead in the bush. All day I slave and toil. At night I go home; and again I find you. It's the same."

Her eyes looked into a dreamy distance. "Perhaps," she said. "In a way. But wouldn't it make a difference whether you found me in rags or in some pretty thing that costs money?"

"Not to me."

"Len," she said, speaking as to a child, "you said before that I had come like a butterfly from a pupa. Do you deny that my dress made me look prettier in your eyes?"

He looked at her in bewilderment. It was true. A sweet scent proceeded from her; it had enveloped him ever since he had drawn his chair to the table. Now, since his painstakingly acquired philosophy had gone to pieces, he felt entirely under the spell of her purely physical attraction for him; and his blush conveyed this knowledge to her.

She realised and rejoiced in the possession over him of a power which she had consciously exercised over others. She bent forward.

His gaze rested on her cheek which seemed to bloom; it was so delicately white; and her lips seemed to blossom forth like scarlet petals, letting him divine the teeth behind.

"Len," she said, "I can't help being what I am. I hate the bush and all the hard work. Look at my mother! I don't want to be as she is."

His head was awhirl. "I had hoped we'd marry soon."

"And your plans?"

He hung his head.

She rose to her feet and stood close. She thought of others. They flattered and wooed her. This boy was different and aimed at different things. She bent down to him, resting her elbows on the table and bringing her head very close to his. "Len," she whispered, "I like you. Half a year ago I thought I loved you. But we were children. I had made up my mind that we had better break off. But since I saw you again, the other day. . . . . I don't know. I wish we could. But you are much too young. Look at the people that live here in the bush, the young people,

the Dicks. What do they get out of their lives? Work, work, work!"

"And while they work, they live!"

"No. They exist. Len!" she whispered; for some inebriety was mounting to her head, not unknown to her, and sweeping her off her balance; she might have broken it by a retreat; but she flouted resistance. "I like you! I want you to think and to dream of me. I want to feel that I possess you even when I am not with you. But marriage? Now? That would destroy it all." Her eyes were swimming. And suddenly she went on, as if in the same breath, "Len, kiss me!"

Her head was within less than an inch of his; stray wisps of loose hair touched his cheek; his eyes roamed over her head, her face, foreshortened as he saw it; over her shoulders, her bosom. Her dress was hanging down below her throat, bent over as she was; and as his eye searched for that edge of her blouse which he had seen in his visions, as a symbol of her virginity, he saw, instead, the edge of her undergarments heaving over rounded breasts.

His brain was in a whirl; prickling currents were sweeping through him. A minute ago, his whole being had been mind; now it was all sense. He felt he was being conquered by something which was not his own, ordinary self; as if another self were rising within him, eclipsing *him*—what was "he" in himself—and merging him into the fiery sea of his blood.

For a moment he struggled; and then he yielded. As if in an electric discharge, head touched head. His

hands grasped her; he rose and pressed her head to his, kissing her mouth, eyes, cheeks, hair, in a paroxism of passion.

The table being between them, she would have fallen forward had she not, by a twisting motion, turned around. Her arms were about his neck; and thus she half lay, half hung till the sudden ecstasy had exhausted itself. She was breathless, flushed; her hair was disarranged; her dress twisted about her body; the chain of her locket broken. A moment both stood facing each other, once more separated by the table.

Len was conscious of a feeling of shame and guilt. Yes, his feelings suffered almost a revulsion as he looked at her and saw her half triumphant, half terrified smile. In that smile there was something which called him. It was not discovery; it was recognition. Had there not been that shade of superiority and knowledge in her smile, he would have spoken and claimed her as his very own; but, though he could not have expressed what had dawned upon him, he was dimly aware that she who stood before him was Eve indeed, but after the fall.

He turned, went to the window, and stood, looking out.

Lydia stepped to the little mirror which hung on the wall by the box with the pail of water. There she rearranged her hair, letting it down and putting it up again; and she straightened her dress.

Had he seen her, there was that in her eyes which might have inflamed him to some sudden deed of

violence for which he would not have been accountable in the least. He might have killed her in order to save her for himself. But he did not turn.

Things were being moved on the stove. Outside, in the yard, the children were playing at hide-and-seek, chasing each other about the granary.

A few minutes later, the clattering of things on the stove having been agreed upon as a signal, Lydia's mother burst into the room, followed shortly by her yawning husband.

Chapter IV

THE TEMPTER

AN hour or so later Len and Lydia went out to the road to have a walk and turned south into the bush trail.

Len was in that peculiar state of mind in which we try to make clear to ourselves what is going on in our subliminal consciousness. He was diffidently feeling along the lanes of his mind.

He had reached that dangerous stage of adolescence in which the instinctive contempt of the boy for the girl changes into a feeling of dependence which may lead to a deification of the other sex or to a revolt against that very deification: he had passed the stage where he might have fallen a prey to entire degradation. He was living through that septennium of his unfolding life in which we establish our whole spiritual outlook; in the very next decisive period he would have to establish his attitude to the world.

Having, if only for a moment, yielded to the purely physical part of the attraction which this girl exercised on him, he felt almost defiled; and, naturally, he was inclined to cast the blame on the girl. Being young, and the higher and the lower in him being at war, he vacillated between the iconoclastic interpretation of his experience, which, as a corol-

lary, would have implied the violent profanation of what was best in him, and an assertion of his own purity, resulting—for deification was impossible for the moment—in hatred of her who had threatened a revelation of the fact that in him the same man lurked as in Joseph and others.

Yet a short time sufficed to lead him back to the other path. His intellectual aspirations had after all been so ardent and irresistible that, by a sort of inertia, they carried him past the gate through which he might have entered the lower world. And, as soon as he had passed it, an entirely new aspect of the matter presented itself.

Between him and this girl there was an everlasting bond. Their union was in no need of mutual vows. It might have led to such vows had the present feeling been reciprocal. Len knew that in this girl, for better or worse, he had met his fate: forever after she would obsess him. Whether she was his or not, he was hers. Only thus could he save himself. Had he been mentally freer, less earthbound, he might have exclaimed like the poet, "If I love you, what business is that of yours?" They might build their world together; or he might build his alone. But even though he did so, he would have to build it with a view to her: no other woman would ever take her place in his soul and mind. He had seen in her what might make him a beast; for that he substituted what might make him a god. As in him, there was something god-like in her, different though it might be. And he subordinated himself, not to her, but as a part is subordinated to

the whole, the whole consisting of the two of them united. They were equinascent, of equal rights and equal worth; and, whether she saw it or not, they fitted together: they formed the possible whole.

The girl by his side had remained as silent as he. In her, too, a change was taking place. She had felt that she had outgrown this boy; and yet she had intended to retain him in the retinue of her admirers. She had looked down on his innocence, at the same time half doubting it. The change in her was due to the fact that, in the whirl of physical passion, he had refrained from going farther than he had gone. For a moment, as he had held her clasped, she had felt his hand on her breasts; she had felt herself sinking; that feeling she knew. A triumphant thought had flashed through her. "I have him!" But a second later it had been revealed that the touch had been accidental only.

Again and again, as they walked, she approached him till their shoulders touched. She took his arm and drew it about her waist; and, since he did not resist, she leaned her head on his shoulder.

Her mind was active, half impelled by anger; yet not without a trace of anguish mixed into it. She must rekindle in him the spark, even though from it sprang a conflagration which might consume them both.

They came to a point where a foot-path turned back to the school.

"Let's go west," Lydia said and stopped; on the trail they would not meet anyone.

"All right," Len answered absently.

The path was narrow for two; they went, their arms intertwined, their bodies in contact. The bush was dense; snow still lay in the shade of thickets. But between them no currents flowed.

They came to an open, low grade where the slush of the thawing masses formed a pool.

Lydia stopped. "I'm afraid we shall have to turn back."

"It's dry over there," Len said. "I'll carry you across."

She laughed as if she were reluctant. But when he held out his hands, she entrusted herself to him, sitting in a loop formed by his arms, encircling his neck with her hands. He stepped slowly out. Her head was beside his own, above his shoulder; the heat of her body communicated itself to his; his senses almost succumbed to the intoxication of her scents. She bent still closer, putting her lips to his ear, and breathed into it. She allowed her head to sink altogether and kissed the hairy nape of his neck. She even pressed her breasts to his shoulder which had become supersensitive to the contact of her flesh. He stopped and whispered, closing his eyes, "Lydia!"

She whispered back, "Len; Len!"

Her breath was hot; he felt her heart beating faster. His own was pounding. He stood and swayed.

Then he stepped out again, and a moment later he put her down on the other side of the pool. As he did so, she looked up into his eyes and then lowered her own. She stood there, his hand-maid,

to do with as he pleased. With that look of hers she had given herself.

He was very white. Like hot waves feelings, thoughts, visions ran through him, shaking his body. One vision dealt him a blow: the woman at Deer River in Joseph's arms. As by a miracle he became cool; his was the responsibility; his forehead knitted itself into a frown; and, taking her arm, he went on along the path.

A wave of heat flowed through her, flooding her scarlet. She had offered herself and had been rejected!

Shortly they reached the school yard; the low tangle of brush left the view unimpeded.

Half a dozen children were playing about the building. They nodded shyly as these two passed.

Lydia disengaged her arm.

When they reached the road, they saw Mr. Jackson in his yard.

"Hello," the old man called across, "back home, Len?"

"I came on Thursday, two weeks ago."

"Won't you go in? Mary's in the house."

Len looked at Lydia. She nodded indifferently.

They turned to the culvert and entered the yard.

"You've grown, young man," Mr. Jackson said as he shook hands.

"Miss Hausman, I think?" he added, a little coolly; for some reason her parents were not on speaking terms with him. "Go to the house, Len. Walk right in."

Lydia hesitated. "I'll be back in a moment," Len said. "I'll just shake hands with Mary."

But when he returned, Lydia had strolled over to the garden-lot, close to the fence. She was not alone. Mr. Jackson had gone to the stable for which he had been bound when he had seen the pair on the grade. The man who was with her wore city clothes such as Len had seen on people who called at the farm, collectors and agents of implement firms.

A vague, uncertain pain settled about his heart. He hung back. The pair stood by the rail fence, close together. The stranger— whom he guessed to be Dick Jackson, Mr. Jackson's oldest son—was speaking animatedly, standing straight and handsome. He was laughing and waving a hand.

Lydia, so much he could see even from a distance, had blushed; and she, too, was laughing in a half embarrassed way.

Len approached. The stranger was wearing a light-coloured suit of tweeds, a soft, low collar, and a striped silk necktie. He had no hat on his head; and his abundant, sleek hair, well-brushed, was almost grey. The nearer Len came, the more distinct became the speech of this city man; till at last he stopped, just before he would have understood every word.

Dick Jackson was facing the road and did not see him; but Lydia had her eyes fastened straight on his. She half frowned and half smiled. It would have been hard to say whether smile and frown were for Len or for the stranger's speech.

Although Len, in an impulse to abstain from

intrusion, had stopped just before he could actually hear what was being said, he knew at once what was going on between the two. The stranger spoke too animatedly not to betray, as in a sort of pantomime, his whole meaning; and Lydia's response, disguised though it was by a sort of conventional display of contrary reactions, showed through this very display with an almost disconcerting transparency.

The stranger bowed and gesticulated, raising himself on the tips of his toes and, for emphasis, dropping back on his heels, every movement of his characterised by that exaggeration which rather underlined than made up for his undoubtedly insincere and stilted flattery of the girl who stood facing him.

Lydia listened as if disapproving of what she heard; but she listened; and she even did so with an effort. Every now and then, a quick laugh confirmed that nothing of what the stranger said was lost on her. Even when, in apparently angry protest, she stamped her foot, it was easily seen that anger and protest were feigned in compliance with what would have been expected from any girl in the great game of flirtation.

There came a point where Lydia answered not only by gestures but by words as well. A quick exchange of brief, fencing sentences seemed to bring the dialogue to a sort of climax. The stranger's gestures took on a theatrical quality which he was at no pains to disguise. Lydia accented whatever she

might be saying by brief nods of her head; for she knew well that she looked most alluring in motion.

To Len the whole scene had something unreal, as if it were the mere harrying projection of an evil dream into the light of day.

All the time Lydia's eyes had been fastened on him. He was pale; a worried frown furrowed his brow.

The fixity of her look produced at last an impression on Dick Jackson; and he turned. For the fraction of a second he seemed startled at the discovery that there had been a looker-on, if not a listener. But his smooth, handsome, and rakish face smiled as he spoke.

"I am sorry. Name is Dick Jackson." He bowed from the hip, ironically; and, catching Len's muttered reply, "Leonard Sterner? Oh, yes, I have heard of you. The great scholar. Mary's been singing your praises. The pedagogue of this institution of learning over there, a limping old man, has taken you under his wing, I understand. Deservedly, no doubt, Mr. Sterner. Don't think I wish to detract from your merits or from the merits of scholarship . . .

"I was telling this young lady a bit of the truth, Mr. Sterner. By George, I am stunned. But she insists on taking it all for wilful flattery. May I appeal to you, young man? It appears she was in your company. Why should she? I take that fact for a confirmation of all I have said. Why should you be walking with a young lady except because you find her charming? I warn you, Mr. Leonard. You are not alone in that opinion. You had better look out!"

Both Len and Lydia had changed colour while this flow of words eddied past them; but the change had been in an opposite sense.

Dick Jackson was looking from one to the other, obviously and with undisguised superiority "playing" Len like a fish hooked at the end of a line. Lydia was unmistakably ashamed of the awkwardness of her escort; and as unmistakably was Len a prey to impotent anger. Impotent anger is never alluring to a girl. She wants her escort to excel in company; and Len had nothing to offer when he was plainly called upon to down the unexpected rival who had crossed his path.

Yet Lydia was far from being this middle-aged man's dupe. She had heard others plead in much the same vein, though never with such assurance and fluency, nor with that easy disregard of even the pretence at sincerity. In a mysterious way this awkward boy of the bush still held an appeal for her. It would have taken very little to reëstablish her faith in him; but even that little was wanting. She could have excused any clumsiness in his rejoinder; she would have approved had he turned away in silent contempt.

Instead, he stammered, plainly disconcerted. With a look at the westering sun, he managed to stutter, "We should be on our way."

"I think so," she said. But she hesitated as she left her post at the fence.

"Must you go indeed?" Dick Jackson exclaimed in mock sorrow. "I assure you, I am full of regrets. Do you live at home?"

"No," she said curtly.

Dick waited a moment as if he expected some further explanation. Then he laughed. "Well, beauty like yours will be found and seen. We shall meet again. Meanwhile, good-by."

"Good-by," Lydia said with an almost imperceptible smile; and she cast a half apologetic look at the man who stood there in overdone admiration. That look had the effect of a shrug.

He laughed mockingly.

Len muttered a word or so; and as he led the girl away, he walked as through a nightmare.

They went to the culvert, crossed it, climbed the flank of the grade, and turned east.

Lydia, on the far side of Len, did not move her head till they had almost passed the yard; but then, seeing from the corner of her eye that the man down there was waving his hand, she could not resist the temptation, smiled, and turned just sufficiently to let him see that she smiled. A moment later, the homestead had been swallowed up by the bush.

At the entrance to Hausman's yard they stopped. Lydia waited for Len to say the next word. He could have done much by the mere expression of contempt for the easy talker whom they had left behind; the trouble was that he felt no contempt for him.

Lydia's look was one of deliberate coquetry. Len trembled as he caught that look. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he flung out an arm. It was an awkward gesture; but somehow it seemed to speak of things deeper or higher than anything in

the man who had waved his hand. Unfortunately, there was nothing amusing in Len; and there was much that was so in Dick Jackson and—others.

Yet, in a sudden impulse, Lydia bent forward, drew Len's head down, and kissed him. Before he could respond, she was gone.

Chapter V

DISQUISITIONS AND THOUGHTS

OFTEN now, thoughts that were mere outlines flitted through Len's brain—like cloud-masses in which we think we recognise familiar shapes that change before we can make their recognition precise.

Spring work started, and Len did his share.

Life had claimed him; he had been willing to let all his aspirations go. The girl had pointed him back to them. She wanted money! Very well. He called on Mr. Crawford.

As ever, Mr. Crawford spoke a good deal, dispensing wisdom. "Don't embalm your experience, Len. Leave it a living thing. If you put the label of a judgment on it and call it an opinion, it is a mummy and nothing else. An opinion formed is part of ourselves, limiting growth in that direction. A multitude of other judgments follow in its wake. We are no longer free."

Dusk rose in the tiny room. Mr. Crawford sat up on his lounge.

"Most of our former experiences are mere skeletons," he went on. "And so is knowledge and education for the average man." Speaking of the camp, he said, "You haven't improved your caligraphy there; but you have assimilated a vision."

"Yes," Len said with sudden decision. "But there

remains this point. I also want to improve my fortunes. I want to see something coming out of what I do."

"You revert to what is called a formal education? You want academic standing?"

"I believe I do," Len said.

Mr. Crawford looked at him and mused. "Len," he said at last, "there are two months left. Will you come here at night? When the work on the farm is done? I will see you through. You can pass your examinations in June. You will then be entitled to enter high school. We shall find a way for that, too, by-and-by."

"If you will give me the time?" Len replied. "I shall get Charlie to do my share of the night-work."

"Then that is settled," said Mr. Crawford.

Darkly, during the next few weeks, thoughts came and went, sometimes no more than adumbrated, sometimes taking shape and forcing a cessation of all other activity, making Len's mind into a seething chaos. His stepfather readily consented to the plan proposed by Mr. Crawford; but Len carried it out in unceasing revolt. For all that, he felt, it was too late.

What drove him into revolt was the fact that he was asked to reacquire in a formal way a knowledge which he already possessed; the time for such studies would have been five years ago. To reason, step for step, through a geometrical demonstration seemed equivalent to naming every muscle at work in his limbs while he walked. Through his experi-

ence in the camp his mind had become used to dealing with facts in an intuitive way. It was facts he wanted. But facts count for little in geometry. He could grasp all the facts involved in a year's course by a single day of reading. Consequently, he was unconscious of an increase in power through what he learned. If he could have flown over the field, assimilating results instead of remembering the method by which the results were arrived at, he might have caught the infection of an inebriety radiated by Mr. Crawford. Mr. Crawford saw "beauty" in a demonstration and in an analysis in grammar. Len felt worm-eaten with impatience.

When, at ten o'clock, he returned from Mr. Crawford's and sat down to study for another hour, the thought of Lydia or Dick Jackson would send him to his feet, staring wildly. His stepfather being in the room, the boy would as suddenly come to himself again and sit down, white with the effort of repressing his passion. When he was alone, he would walk to and fro till he trembled and shook with a feeling of the urgent necessity of action. Action was needed; not this trifling with inconsequential bits of knowledge. His books seemed baubles.

Yet he had undertaken this task for Lydia's sake. She wanted money; money is not made on pioneer farms until after many years of seemingly futile work. He had sworn not to see her again till he had something tangible to show for his work. He must pass his examinations.

Sometimes, feeling a part of himself to be in

danger, he wished to despise the world and everybody in it. He tried to revisualise the first of his meetings with the girl; he could not do so. The mere thought of her evoked the vision of the one single moment just before she had lain in his arms, in the kitchen of the homestead to the west. That vision sent a wave of hot blood into his brain, flooding it opaquely and blotting out all articulate thought.

She had more than half slipped away from him. Why? Doubt directed blasphemies against fate, providence, God. He cursed the powers that had directed his life. The effect was the opposite of what he would have expected. His passion redoubled.

At last he sought refuge in an artifice. He saw Lydia etherealised, de-carnalised; she was Miranda; *she* might have been *his* redemptress. He pictured her as she had looked when Dick Jackson was speaking to her. She had held back; *she* had shown the man that contempt which Len should have shown him. Baseness had attacked her; she had resisted. She stood before his mental vision, untouched, all the more desirable for having been tempted, white in immaculate innocence. In order to justify his condemnation of the world, he needed to idealise her; and he did so with the facility of his youth. She must be enshrined so that she might save him; him, the flesh had begun to trouble. To give in to the flesh meant utter ruin. The spirit in him needed reincarnation and found it in a fiction of her.

Work helped; and he worked indefatigably.

In thinking of things which she had said, he omitted all those which did not agree with the new picture of her. When she had said money, she had meant achievement. When she had spoken of pretty clothes, they were to attract none but him. She was worthy of all the world could possibly give her. She was worth striving for, serving for, like Rachel in the story. In spite of his distaste for them, he kept at his studies with a dogged pertinacity.

May came and went; June opened up.

The field work consisted once more of breaking. Charlie drove the team of the bush-plow which Kolm guided; Len picked and piled stones and brush. The mother, who once more looked forward to a confinement, remained at home.

One day Kolm ran his plow-point against a rock of unusual size. He drew a new furrow, plowing deep, trying to catch the stone at a point nearer its centre of gravity. The five horses came to a stop.

Kolm threw his plow to one side and called for Len. The three of them attacked the soil surrounding the stone with picks and shovels. They were baffled by an impossible task. Len suggested burning.

The boys piled brush and limbs and roots on top and fired them. Kolm unhitched; and Len and he drew barrels of water from the well. When the huge fire had died down, they brushed the embers off and upset their water-barrels over the heated boulder. With noises like pistol-shots, it cracked under the sudden contraction, throwing exfoliated fragments of granite in all directions. But it did not

split perpendicularly and lay there, as much of an impediment as ever.

Kolm stood and scratched his head. His obstinacy was aroused. He kicked at the stone. "We'll get you yet, my boy," he said.

But it was supper time; and they went home.

At the table, Kolm said to Len, "Jackson's got dynamite at his place. They blast their stumps. I wouldn't waste good money on stumps. But I've more than half a mind to try it on that rock."

"I'll take one of the mares," Len said, "and get a stick."

"Two," Kolm said, rising. "I'll drill the hole under that pebble."

Mr. Jackson, grey and loose-jointed, was standing on the grade in front of his yard. As Len, for whom he had a fondness, approached, he flung an arm aloft which bent like a flail, with a wide, all-embracing gesture. It was the hour of sunset: a marvellously quiet evening on which a lamp would have burned without a flicker in the open air. The bush stood black, rigid, breathless against a flaming west.

"Look at that," the old man said, his voice sounding hushed in the vastness of space. "Wherever the world is as God made it, it's glory! Only where man sits down, it's spiled!"

For a moment Len stood, infected by the mood of the other man. Then he mentioned his errand; and together they went, in the paling of the dusk, into the yard.

Mr. Jackson stopped, looking about in evident distaste. "And look at that!" This time the gesture embraced the stable, still reeking with the winter's smells, the manure pile, the house. "Young man," he said, "I see you keep working. You learn something; and it doesn't take you away from the land. Work, work, young man. I've three boys; and all three are good-for-nothings. One went to the city; and home he comes only when he needs money. What's money? Money! It won't feed you. The other two went to the wars. They're in Sandgate, Kent, walking the roads instead of raising wheat and barley to repair the damage the crazy fools have done in Europe."

At mention of Mr. Jackson's oldest son, Len's heart had taken a jump. "Mr. Dick," he said. . . . "He's a commercial traveller, isn't he?"

"So he says," Mr. Jackson replied. "Seems to me he's an apron-chaser and little else. I've been feeding him and his wife."——

On his way home, Len felt exalted by contrast to the degradation into which his rival had fallen by his own father's testimony.

It was dark when he reached the field. Kolm had drilled a slanting hole under the rock. He inserted the two sticks of dynamite to which he had attached the fuse. Then he applied the match.

"Run!" he shouted. "Run!" And in huge strides he made for the bush himself, through the last of the dusk.

Two minutes later a huge, dull detonation

rocked the air; earth and fragments of stone burst from the ground as from a crater.

For the first time in many weeks Len felt a zest in what he did. Dick Jackson loomed less menacingly over his mental horizon.

Chapter VI

BEHIND THE BARN

SHORTLY after, Len wrote on his Entrance examinations, under Mr. Crawford's supervision.

July came; and one Saturday Mr. Crawford passed Kolm's farm, drove in and, finding Len, told him that he was going to town. The marking of the examination papers was finished; and he was going to speak to a friend of his, over the wire, to find out how matters stood. He asked Len to call on him the following morning.

So, on Sunday, shortly after ten o'clock, Len got the mare ready and went south along the Big Slough. He had made up his mind to go on to Odensee if he had passed; for the first time since Dick Jackson had discomfited him he was going to see Lydia who could not know how much he had matured in the interval. He felt a man now. As a man, he had mastered his impatience and deferred all conclusions which he might have drawn.

Mr. Crawford met him excitedly at the gate. "Congratulations!" he said with a smile in his wrinkled eyes. For the first time it struck Len how much the man had aged of late.

"I passed?" he asked.

"You passed first in the province."

Len looked up. What was that?

"Your papers ranked above those of all other candidates in the province. Tomorrow, your name and, as soon as they can get it, your picture will be broadcast over the west."

It was a moment of triumph. This was the rock on which he would build his career!

Len was invited to stay for an early dinner, consisting of milk, bread, and the first fruits of a little garden, for Mr. Crawford was a vegetarian. Dinner over, Len's picture was taken with the help of a camera. When he took leave of Mr. Crawford, he said exultantly, "I shall be a university professor yet!"

"You will be the spokesman of the humble and poor in spirit!"

Then Len was riding along the correction line which led straight into Odensee. He felt wonderfully sure of himself. He would go on with his academical work and master the high school course within two years. Then he and Lydia could be married.

Soon he urged his horse into a lumbering gallop. A mile or two east of the village he came to cleared land. On both sides the bush fell away. Open farms lay ahead. The grade was high where it emerged from the forest. The land in front lay spread out like a fan half opened.

What he saw was accomplishment, wilderness conquered. Behind him lay endeavour, dumb, feeling its way with groping arms. Which was the land he belonged to? He felt a stranger where he was. Cut here and there by bands of trees spread out for

wind-breaks, the level country lost itself in the distance where darkly, hazily, the Dusky Mountains rose. Whitish vapour banks of clouds enclosed the horizon, their outlines washed into the pale blue of the sky. The distance, like the future, was undefined.

Len rode on. In half an hour he stopped at the gate of the yard which was his goal. Two or three buggies stood slanting out into the grassy margin of the road, the horses tied to fence-posts, preempting what little shade there was. In the yard a car stood, empty.

Len dismounted and tied his horse. With a sultry heat the sun burned down on the spot. He opened the gate and crossed the yard to the big, curb-roofed stable, both doors of which stood open, so that he looked right through it into a little thicket of plum trees behind. He wanted to see whether he could stable his mount.

The whole barn was empty. He was on the point of turning back to fetch his horse when a voice which electrified him smote his ear, followed by a laugh from several throats. He went through the driveway and looked out through the open door at the rear. But instantly he shrank back. Without will or decision of his own he became a listener-in, petrified at what he saw and heard.

Three young men were standing in a semi-circle about a girl.

The girl, head bent back, in a characteristic pose of hers, was leaning against the wall of a granary to the right. The expression of her face was that

of supercilious contempt. Two of the young men were laughing; the third, in the centre, frowned with a concentration of anger which made his small face looked wizened, shrivelled, bloodless.

"You promised," the latter said. "You are a jilt, a flirt, a cheat! Do you deny that you promised?"

"I have changed my mind," the girl said insolently. "I don't want you. I don't even want to see you, ever!"

"She's promised half a dozen times to marry *me!*" one of the laughers expostulated to him who was so much in earnest. "She doesn't want to marry at all."

"No," she said. "I don't. Nobody from this burg at least. No farmer. The man who wants to marry me must come in a sixty-horse power car."

"I'll get the car. I'll sell my farm."

"To do what?"—This with a smile of contempt.

"Anything. Go to town. I can work. Lydia!" he begged abjectly. "Listen. It's silly to talk here in the presence of others. You promised to come with me this afternoon. Keep that promise. Give me an hour, half an hour, fifteen minutes, alone."

"Not a second!" she replied, her hands behind her back.

The young man in the centre, of small build, but sturdy, a sinister tenseness in his face, stood with fists clenched as though he were going to throw himself on her.

The second laugher put a hand on his shoulder. "Listen, Gus," he said. "Be sensible. You should

know her by this time. Don't get excited. She's promised every one she knows to marry him. That doesn't mean anything with her. Does it, Liddy?"

The girl frowned. "Not where you are concerned," she said.

He laughed. "Do you hear it, Gus? It's no more than three weeks ago that she swore everlasting love to me. On this very spot. She kissed and hugged me as if there were nobody on earth that was dearer to her. She's kissed and hugged you. You know what she's like. You are not going to do anything foolish on account of a girl like that?"

The girl tossed her head. "I am not going to stand here to be insulted!" she said with a motion to escape.

But the young man called Gus forestalled her. "Lydia," he said grimly, "you can't get away like that. If you do, something terrible is going to happen. You can have the pick of the men. . . ."

Lydia fixed her eye on him, and he went silent. "I can have the pick of the men," she repeated. "That's why I don't want you nor any one of you. I want you to leave me alone. I don't want you!"

Once more she tried to escape and succeeded. In less than a second she was in the barn and stood, confronting Len. A gasp broke from her; and in the same breath she added, "Nor you, either!" flinging the words at him as if she were flinging a stone. Breaking into a run, she swept by him.

Len followed her; but for the fraction of a second he had stood stunned; and when he reached the front door, she was gone.

From behind the barn shouts and a yell rang forth. The backdoor of the house opened, and Mr. Smith stepped out. With a glance at Len whom he did not recognise he crossed the yard and went past the stable to the scene behind.

Hardly knowing what he did, Len returned to the gate where his horse was still cropping the short grass as far as the halter-rope permitted. He untied the slip-knot, threw the rope over the horse's neck, and vaulted on his back. A second later he was wildly galloping along the low, smooth grade to the east.

Chapter VII

ON THE HIGHWAY

THE sequel of the scene behind the barn which Len had witnessed became a matter of public record; and though one of the actors in that sequel was never discovered, Len could easily supply his name to himself. Yet it took more than a year before he succeeded in piecing the events together in his mind.

Lydia had been frightened by Gus Kahler's threat. She had taken flattery, courtship, love-making as her dues; she had taken them from anyone because they were pleasurable for the moment. The very readiness with which she had given promises had seemed to guard her against serious consequences. The first real admiration with which she had met had taken her captive. But as admirers multiplied, she had looked upon them as no more than so many pawns in a game of chess. To be kissed, to be held in somebody's arms: who could base a claim on such trifles? She allowed these things because she craved them, craved them from anyone, from Len as well as from others; from him, for some mysterious reason, more than from others. Then, suddenly, she grew cautious; she had learned that beauty has a market value.

Dick Jackson had appeared on the scene: first at Macdonald, setting her ears a-tingle with fluent,

flattering talk; then at Odensee where he had met her two or three times. He had written letters, full of plans: in the country, she was throwing herself away; she must come to the city. Almost against her will, as though she were caught in a tangle and forced on by the logic of things, she had conceived the plan to use him as a stepping stone.

For awhile Gus Kahler had seemed to be a real conquest. Young as he was, he owned two quarter sections of land. He had been the only child of his parents. He wanted a wife. Had he insisted on an immediate marriage, she would have accepted him; but he wanted to build a new house. When the house was finished, her horizon had widened so as to include the great city. Gus appeared in a new light: though in no way mis-shapen, the very contraction of his features and limbs made him appear like a dwarf and a hump-back. She began to avoid him.

Then Dick Jackson actually proposed to carry her off. He would come for her in a car, on Sunday, July sixteen; she was to meet him at the gate of the school yard, at ten o'clock at night. There would be no moon. Flight with him seemed to cut the Gordian knot of her perplexities. Len she would forget.

Lydia was ready for Dick Jackson: her few things were tied up in a bundle and deposited in a corner of the garden adjoining the school yard. All she needed to do was to slip through the fence and walk across to the gate. But, of course, that very day Gus must turn up and ask her to come for

a ride in his car. The whole quarrel had arisen from her refusal. She was not going to take the risk of outstaying her time. To escape him, she had sought the company of others among her admirers. Gus had followed her; and the rest Len had witnessed.

When Lydia had escaped from the barn, she had slipped around the house and into the garden which, along its eastern edge, was bordered by a thicket of currant bushes and raspberry canes. Between these she had dropped to the ground.

She crouched there for hours.

In the yard, somebody started the car and ran it out to the road. From the door of the house, her employer called her name. . . .

Slowly the sun was obscured; distant rumblings heralded a thunder-storm. Carefully she rose and made her way, half crouching, to the west edge of the garden where a long line of sweet-corn canes offered a scanty shelter. Then a dust cloud swept over the landscape; a few drops of rain fell. She peered out; the road was deserted. Fearing a wetting, everybody had sought the shelter of his home.

She fetched her bundle, crawled through the fence, and ran for the school which was never locked.

It was most unlikely that anyone should visit there on a Sunday; and yet she did not feel entirely safe in the class-room. She hid in a closet where storm windows were stored. It was dark there; and she would be safe from detection. Thunder rolled; but the storm swept by without breaking. Yet, the sky having clouded over, night fell early. From the

moment when dusk had closed in, she remained tense, listening with all her might for the signal, three hoots of the horn: long, short, short. Suddenly she thought of Len as he had stood in the barn, speechless, struck dumb. She laughed at the memory, but not without a strange foreboding that his sight would haunt her through many years to come.

At last the darkness became black and impenetrable. The smell of the smoke of cow-smudges pervaded the building. She forced her thoughts back to Dick Jackson. She began to fear that something might have happened to prevent him from coming. "I shall walk to Minor!" she said to herself; for flight now seemed the only way out. Taking her bundle, she slipped into the open.

A dense, black tent of cloud made the atmosphere feel close and hot. There was a smell of dampness and mist; veil above veil of smudge smoke made the air impenetrable to the eye. With the utmost care she closed the door behind her.

And slowly, on the tips of her toes, she made for the road. When she reached the gate, she was on the point of passing through when she saw two ruddy spots of light moving through the blackness right in front. She divined rather than saw two men sitting on the rail which braced the gate-post to the next fence-post north; they were smoking. Noiselessly she retreated, turning to her right.

She had hardly climbed through the fence when she saw, far to the south, two bright lights close

together, like the glittering eyes of some huge beast. Her heart was pounding; that must be Dick's car!

She turned south again. Dick had written "at the gate." She must get as close to the gate as she dared to go.

A minute later the hum of the engine became audible. In the middle of the road little protuberances of the soil began to catch the light. The car approached with amazing speed. Bushes, trees, fence-posts sprang into a momentary glare and were eclipsed again.

The car, roaring now, swung to the east, leaving the road and running over its grassy margin, curving for the turn. The two wide pencils of light swept over the school-house, throwing it into a veiled relief through the layers of smoke. Then they picked out other objects: the two men sitting on the fence-rail; they were the two boys of the afternoon who had laughed. The horn sang out: long, short, short. The next moment she realised with dismay that the bright glare had swept over her, revealing her to every eye that might chance to look. She jumped up and ran.

Then the pencil of light revealed another sight. On the far side of the road stood the tense figure of Gus Kahler, gun in hand.

She screamed and plunged forward.

A shot rang out.

The door to the tonneau of the car was opened, and she fell in.

An unearthly yell was the signal for an explosion of uproar.

A second shot.

The car, its engine roaring, began to glide to the south, rapidly picking up speed.

Gus Kahler's first shot had entered Rudolph's knee, plowing up along the thigh and entering the abdomen. The man fell off his perch.

"Damn you!" Henry, his neighbour, called out. "You have shot Rudolph!"

"Sorry," Gus replied coolly. "It was meant for her."

He placed the stock of the gun on the road and bent over it. Deliberately he took its muzzle into his mouth. The fingers of his hand fumbled at the trigger; the second shot shattered his skull.

From the house across the road a man came running with a lantern; another followed. From everywhere human figures seemed to rise out of the ground. And when they surveyed the scene, they found one man dead, the other dying.

PART III. MANHOOD

"Où Saint Antoine a vu surgir
comme des laves
"Les seins nus et pourprés de
ses tentations."

Chapter I

THE SLOUGH

THE excitement that had followed the happenings on the highway at Odensee had been intense for awhile; but, as is commonly the case in backwoods settlements, it had subsided almost as quickly as it had arisen; and things had settled back into their usual routine.

Nothing mattered to Len. Love and learning: two things he had valued; but the disaster in which the former was shattered destroyed the value of the latter as well. A year ago hail had withdrawn him from study; a new disaster was to withdraw him from the despair of love.

One night, shortly after Lydia's flight, work having been finished early, owing to the fact that there had been a rain, the whole Kolm family was assembled in the sitting room of the house. All of them, except Len, were in a festive mood. A good rain in summer was a thing to rejoice in. It not only did more good than any amount of work could have done; it also proclaimed the next day a holiday.

Kolm, armed with a little dictionary, reclined in his easy-chair, reading one of Len's books. Every few minutes he gave a huge, contented yawn, in anticipation of the pleasures of rest and sleep.

His wife sat by the table, an old, tattered album in her hands, filled with picture postcards, a legacy from her first husband.

Startlingly, about eleven o'clock, a knock sounded at the door.

Mrs. Kolm sprang to her feet, holding a hand against her heart. "I thought I'd die!" she said.

Kolm had risen. Book in hand, he went to the kitchen door and called, "Come in!"

Joseph appeared, pale, dishevelled, without hat, soaked with mud up to his hips, and carrying a sooty, bespattered lantern.

"Are your horses in?" he asked without a greeting.

"No," Kolm replied. "We turned them out."

"They're in the slough!" Joseph said grimly.

Kolm shrugged his shoulders. "Well?"

"Quick!" Joseph shouted. "There's been a cloud-burst south. The water's backing into the slough. They're drowning."

Kolm snapped out a curse. "Len, Charlie!" he roared. "Lanterns! Ropes!" And, dropping his book, he burst into a fury of activity.

In less than five minutes they were running, all four, along the south-east trail, through the bush west of the slough, Joseph leading.

The night was pitch-dark, very quiet, with a fine, drizzling rain still falling. It seemed all the darker for the three little spheres of visibility surrounding the bobbing lanterns.

Joseph talked breathlessly. "I was over to Kurtz's, two miles east of the dam. And stayed for

supper. Kurtz loaned me the lantern. I'd never have got out without it. I tried to cut across the slough. And got in to my hips. The swamp sucks."

They came out on the slough trail, slipping and stumbling. Kolm and Len were grimly, Charlie almost pleasurably excited. They passed a depression in the slough; and Joseph raised his lantern: the hollow was filled with oozing water; yet the surrounding parts looked deceptively dry.

"I can't understand it," Kolm gasped. "Such a bit of rain! Just right for the crops!"

"Down south it was a cloud-burst," Joseph repeated. "It's backing up."

"There are underground channels," Len threw in.

In another few minutes they came to the spot. Again Joseph stopped and raised his lantern above his head.

The black, mucky soil of the slough was churned up into the semblance of black, pitch-like froth. The trail on which they stood was firm; it was held together by the roots of the tree stumps and the living brush which covered the ridge to the west.

"They got out," Joseph said, for in the thin light thrown by the lanterns nothing seemed to stir in the slough beyond the shiny, creamy confusion of the churned-up spot.

But that very moment the rattling sneeze of a horse sounded as if the beast were trying to clear its obstructed respiratory organs.

"Quick!" Kolm shouted. "Get some brush together. Dry stuff. Light a fire, so we can see."

Len was already plunging into the thickets, searching for dry wood. Charlie, hardly as yet comprehending, plunged after him.

"Here," Len said grimly, "take the lantern and light me."

A pile of dry wood, superficially wetted by the rain, was soon thrown up on the trail, all four working in silence. The crackling of the branches and poles which they gathered sounded oddly as though some enormous beast were crashing through the brush in the night. Then Kolm, standing by the pile, shaved a dry stick into thin flakes with his pocket knife. Len, Joseph, Charlie went on gathering fuel.

A match flared up and, with the shavings, was applied to the base of the brush pile. Dense clouds of steam and smoke surged upward; and a moment later the cowl of darkness lifted. Crackling and hissing, the whole pile kindled; the flames shot upward in the draught created by their own heat as if blown by bellows.

All four stood and peered across the slough which they could not enter. Wetly glistening, grey droplets of rain streaked the field of vision. Then, like a picture developing on a photographic film, the outline of a scene of horror grew upon their sight. Two gleaming points were the eyes of one of the horses which, half immersed in the mud, had reared up, pawing. Mud was dripping from its head and mane. Its blood-red nostrils were fiercely dilated. Its quivering lips were the picture of death-whipped panic. From the side of its arching neck

a bloody trickle ran into the slough. Its hind legs held by the clinging, enveloping, impeding swamp, it pawed the air with its fore-legs.

"That's the mare," Len said. "She's bleeding."

As if to furnish an explanation, the bush behind them broke into yelps and howls.

"Timber wolves!" Kolm said. "They've chased them in."

Now that he saw the extent of the calamity, he was strangely quiet. He reached for the ropes which Joseph had dropped.

The flames behind them, kindled quickly, as quickly died down.

"Charlie," Kolm said, "attend to the fire. Len, get more fuel. Joseph, here, help with the ropes."

Feverishly the work proceeded, the two men knotting the odds and ends together, the boys gathering a new pile of wood.

The presence of the shadowy figures on the trail seemed to have given the horses a direction for their desperate struggles.

"Len," Kolm shouted. "Light!"

He had a sufficient length of rope to try a throw at the head of the mare. The crackling flames shot up again, this time rising to a height of ten, fifteen feet. The semi-circle of the slough illumined by the light extended; and in the irradiation of this brightness the whole scene of the disaster outlined itself.

The very slough seemed to move. In one place, four twitching legs stuck up into the air; in another, a horse lay on its side, immersed in the mud, but

twisting its head upward; that head looked as if moulded of chocolate-brown, wet clay.

Then, just as the flames leapt highest, Kolm was ready to throw the loop of his rope. The mare, seeing the dry ridge ahead—she was facing the fire, gathered all her failing strength into one mighty effort and pawed and struggled forward. Her foot seemed to strike something that offered resistance. Kolm's rope flew out; and the loop caught over her head. But, simultaneously, piercingly, blood-curdlingly, the universal cry of animal distress stabbed the night. What the mare had struck with her forefoot was the prostrate, half immersed body of another horse.

The two men pulled; the boys stood tensely behind. The mare struggled up and raised herself out of the clinging mire. Splashing, sucking noises were intermingled with the shouts of the men.

Then Kolm and Joseph stumbled back and fell.

In an instinctive realisation of the help which the rope afforded, the mare had rigidly bent her head upward and backward. But the animal on which she tried to gather her four feet for a desperate leap went into convulsions beneath her; and, deprived of her foothold, she pitched forward, into the mud. Her hind legs shot out into the air, scattering mud all about; her whole body contracted and whipped out like a steel spring of enormous power before she went limp and collapsed.

Kolm had gathered himself to his feet and was throwing the ropes over his shoulder. The flames

were dying down. Len reached for more of the fuel which lay ready to hand.

"No," Kolm said. "It's useless. I can't look on any longer. They're for the wolves."

Chapter II

TO FARM OR NOT TO FARM

WHEN apprised of the loss of the horses, Mrs. Kolm became voluble the moment Joseph had left.

"I've always said it," she flared up at her husband as he was sitting in his easy-chair, stunned and speechless. "You are no good. Where are we now? Here we sit in the bush, with a crop of twenty-five acres, and not a horse to harvest it with. It's just like you! Great big lump of a good-for-nothing! No brains! Ah yah! You can gape; and that's all you can do! I told you years ago, it's no good trying to farm in this country. Let's go to town, I said. Let's run a butcher shop. Good money in that! But no! It didn't matter what I said. Not a bit. You had that bug in your head and wanted to be a farmer. It is laughable! When in the old country you'd been a factory hand!"

"Yah, yah," the man cried in desperation. "Whose farm is this, yours or mine? What would you have done if I hadn't come along? Given it away, I suppose? You couldn't sell. Who'd buy in this bush? And start in town with thousands of dollars of debt? I didn't buy those horses. They were here. They aren't paid for yet. It took a man with brains to buy without money. All I'm good for is to pay for them."

"Sure!" Mrs. Kolm yelled. "Who but a fool would have turned them out in weather like this?"

Kolm laughed a bitter laugh. "Why didn't you say that before? What was the matter with the weather? Easy talking now. There isn't any feed on the place. That's why I turned them out."

"What harm would it have done them to go without feed for a night? Better than drown in a slough, it seems to me!"

"It's the wolves," Kolm said meekly.

At that, his wife seemed to explode. She stood in the kitchen door, grabbed a wooden ladle, and stepped up to the man as if to belabour him with her weapon. "The wolves? No. It's you, you fool!"

Charlie was sitting on the couch, staring with a bewildered look. Len stood in the corner where he had fastened a shelf for his books.

At the last word of his mother's he veered and came forward, touching her on her arm. "Leave him alone," he said. "He's got enough to worry him. What do you want to quarrel for? You know as well as he that it isn't his fault if the horses are lost."

His mother, amazed at his interference, flinched at the hardness of his voice. She shook his hand off. "You side with him, do you?"

"I do," Len said, "when he's in the right."

Kolm was still sitting in his easy-chair. He looked up at Len. It seemed ludicrous that this boy should have interfered between his wife turned termagant and him who could have crushed her with a blow.

"What's got into you?" he asked admiringly.

Len shrank. Not that he was afraid of his stepfather. He shrank from that in himself which had driven him to interfere; he had judged; and his judgment had driven him to act, like a man.

"Nothing," he said. "But what is the use of quarrelling?"

"You're right," Kolm said briefly. "Charlie, to bed."

"Yes, father," Charlie said as though he were still no more than a child. Nobody in the house seemed to notice that Charlie, too, had grown to be nearly a man. "Good night."

"Good night."

Next morning Kolm went all over the place as if he were appraising things and weighing their significance. When he stepped over the pole-gate that led to the bush trail and the fields, he was joined by Len.

Len had, during the night, probed into every wish of his own and weighed it against every duty as he had come to perceive it.

Kolm looked at him. With a queer sort of embarrassment he realised that he valued the good opinion of this boy. In former times he had often bullied his wife and provoked her till she worked herself into a rage. He had been tempted to do so last night; but a new shame had held him back. Kolm was convinced that in sexual matters Len had remained innocent; suddenly he understood that it was not from ignorance but from deliberate choice; and that gave the boy a moral superiority over the older man. But Len had also behaved as if he were

going to assume command; and that Kolm resented; all his instincts were autocratic.

Side by side they went in silence through the bush-fringe. The trail was wet; pools of water stood in the hollows. The young, vigorous trees were hung with droplets which shivered down on them when head or shoulder touched branch or bole. The morning was summer-cool; the sky, uniformly grey.

They came to the first of the fields: thirteen acres under wheat, five under oats. The black leaf-mould which formed the soil was firm and crumbly. The crop stood well.

Again they threaded the bush and emerged on the second field: seven acres of wheat, more advanced than that on the other strip: it stood in the shot-blade. The leaves of the plants were stiff, almost bursting with their fulness of moisture.

Kolm shrugged his shoulders as he looked over the field. "Just what was needed," he said. "But!" And after awhile he added almost reminiscently, "Twenty acres of wheat at twenty-five bushels at two dollars a bushel. A thousand dollars would cut quite a slice off our debt." His tone implied that he was speaking of what might have been.

On Len's brow sat a frown. A disk-harrow stood on the trail which skirted the field. He sat down on the tongue.

Kolm did the same, sunk in thought.

"You think of quitting?" Len asked.

Kolm shrugged his shoulders. "What's to be done?"

"That's the question. Go to town? Work for wages?"

"They all do it," Kolm said. "Hausman will be the next."

Again they sat in silence for some time. Then Len enquired, "How much is owing on the horses?"

"Two hundred or thereabout," Kolm replied. "That crop would have paid it. The largest, the best we've had. Might run to thirty bushels an acre."

"That crop is going to pay it," Len said. "And if I've got to cut it by hand."

Kolm laughed. "What are we going to live on meanwhile? We can't haul cream without horses."

"Sell the cattle."

"There's a lien-note on them and all their increase."

"Pay the note off. There'll be something over. Keep a cow or two, so you've milk for the house and a few pigs." Len was patting Rover, the dog that had followed them.

"Cut by hand!" Kolm exclaimed. "Who's going to bind it?"

Len played his trump card; he had not lain sleepless in vain. "Oxen," he said, "will both cut and bind it. We'll stack it as always. Thresh from the stack, and you don't need horses. As soon as harvest is finished, I'll hire out. My wages for the winter will pay for half the team anyway. We'll sell what we can. Oxen need less feed than horses."

Kolm sat and mused. He had fighting blood in him. "Work for wages!" he said to himself. "Have

a boss! Take orders! Be dependent on the whims of a man!"

"Instead of on God and what he sends," Len added.

Another silence ensued. Kolm half turned and touched the boy with his elbow. He nodded backwards, chuckled, and spoke, "She wants me to go to town and be a butcher!"

Len nodded. A strange exaltation invaded him. He sat in the council of grown-ups. He felt very near the man by his side. "What did you come to this country for?" he asked with seeming irrelevance and was electrified by the man's response.

Kolm slapped his knee. "Exactly!" he roared and stood up.

Len also rose. "I'll work out," he said. "I don't mind. So long as this place is here to come back to. There's Charlie, also. This place is as much his as mine."

"How about teaching?" Kolm asked.

Len shrugged his shoulders.

"Aren't you sorry?"

"Doesn't matter," Len said.

"By golly!" Kolm exclaimed. "I tell you, Len, it will be a black day for me when I'll have to leave this place. You'll go to the camp in winter?"

"If I don't find anything better," Len said.

"We'll beat them yet!" Kolm exclaimed.

An hour later they were again facing Len's mother. She glanced from Kolm to Len, feeling that there was a new bond between them.

"Well?" she asked, standing in the kitchen and looking into the living room.

Neither Kolm nor Len answered at once. Kolm let himself down into his easy-chair.

"Crop's good," he said at last. "Rain was just what we needed."

She turned and rattled pots and pans on the stove.

Kolm looked at Len, who sat down, shrugging his shoulders.

The silence lengthened. At last Kolm rose and cleared his throat. He stood in the kitchen door, looking at his wife. The expression on his face was hard to define; it was a mixture of irony and sullen challenge. "We'll harvest . . ." he began.

But she veered and faced him. "There won't be any harvest if I can help it."

"There won't?" he asked, his tone changing into that of good-natured banter. "I don't know about that. Somebody'll harvest it if we don't. However, that's neither here nor there. The point is you want to quit. That's right, isn't it?"

"Right? You bet it's right. I've had enough."

"Now listen here, Anna," he went on, still in that half-humorous drawl of his. "Let's reason this out. Don't let's be rash. We'll do what pays best."

"It would have paid you long ago to move to town!"

"Maybe it would. We'll grant that. Fact is, we didn't do it. The farm was yours. You stayed. You

made the mistake. You made another mistake. You married me."

"You're right," she scoffed without stopping her work.

Kolm laughed. "Trouble is, can't be helped. No use talking of past mistakes. If the farm were yours or mine, we could leave and be rid of debt at least. We'd be beggars; but we'd be out of debt. As it is, if we leave, we'll have all our debt left. As for the horses, I'll pay up."

She stared at him. "Pay up?"

"Yea. We can't sell cream any longer. I'll sell the cows."

She laughed. "You wouldn't have caught my first man in any such fool thing."

"No?"

"No. He'd have found some way to wriggle out of that."

"Oh yes," he nodded. "He had brains!"

"He had. He'd have sold the cattle and buried the money."

"And cheated his creditors. I have no gift that way. I have no brains."

"You're right," she said once more. "You're a blasted fool!"

Kolm frowned. "Steady now!"

"Yes," she screamed, losing control over herself. "Your honesty consists in letting us work like slaves and starving us to boot."

"Starving you? Listen here, Anna, you can't say that. We've always had our three squares a day."

"Three squares! As if that made life! I haven't

a friend anywhere around. I haven't a person I can talk to! There's the Hefter-woman east, and the Hausman-she west. The one's a whore; and the other's a cluck sitting over her nest. I want a neat little parlor, be it ever so small."

"All right!" Kolm roared, losing control over his temper in turn. "All that we know. All that we've heard a thousand times if we've heard it once. Let me tell you. I married you nine years ago because I took pity on you; not because of your pretty eyes. You thought I married you because I wanted a farm with ten acres broken on it. I didn't. I had a homestead of my own. I broke the ten acres on this place myself. I was your hired man. Hired man! Did I ever get my wages? I could have broken that much on my own place and not be encumbered with you and yours. And the debt I assumed! You bet I'd never have owed two thousand dollars or more if that first man of yours hadn't had so much brains and done so much fool buying. You can have your choice. I'll stay and try once more to make this place a go. I'm not beaten. If I'm beaten within a year, I'll quit myself. But not before that. You can stay or you can go. But if you go, you go alone. And if I'm to be anyone's hired man, I go back to Europe as soon's the war's over. You can take your choice."

She looked at him, cowed. At last she stammered, "How'd you harvest without any horses?"

"With oxen."

"Who's going to pay for a team of oxen?"

"Len will."

"Oh-o! This is a put-up job between you? That's the way you've figured it out?"

"That's the way!"

She turned to the stove and busied herself.

"Well," Kolm said, "which is to be?"

"You'll see in a day or two," she said.

"The dooce take the woman!" Kolm laughed and went out, slamming the door.

Chapter III

A SECOND DEPARTURE

THE oxen were bought, the cattle sold. Len had signed the notes jointly with Kolm. Fall work proceeded.

Lydia! Whenever the name emerged, it coupled itself with fragments of visions. These caused a tightening of the heart or a releasing of its valves so that the blood, in a sudden burst, rushed more freely and fully through the sluices of his veins, according as they showed him the heaving edge of a simple dress which moved with her bosom, the first blushes slowly mounting from body to head, the mere outline of her slender, lithe, and well-shaped form—or, in her later phases, the bold, challenging look of her violet eyes, the angry assurance of the toss of her head, the sensuous and yet cool abandonment to his caresses in the kitchen of her parental house.

He tried to put these visions away; they would emerge. With his head bent sideways, in the tenseness of his effort to reduce his feelings to a mere play of thought or mind, he drove his oxen in front of the whirring binder.

In order to submerge the obsession of the past, he tried to shape his plans for the future; only to find that all his plans were sketched with that un-

dercurrent of an aim at a final conquest of the girl; at a union with her in life or death.

He tried to think scornfully of her. He thought of every trifle in their short, ardent intercourse which stood, at the bar of a moral tribunal, as an indictment against her. She had flown—with whom? It never occurred to him, such was his intuitive grasp of her essence, that she might have gone alone. In all his experience there was only one single thing at which a girl could aim; and that was to join her fortunes to those of a man. She more than others! She had trifled with him; she had trifled with at least three men besides. No doubt she was trifling with a fifth one right now. She had said that whoever wanted her must have money; having money meant to Len almost the same as being a merchant; and the idea of a merchant was linked in his mind with that of the old Jew in McDougall. That man sat like an ogre on his money-chest. Len's whole being revolted.

Yet, the old Jew had sons; they were young. But even at that he felt repelled: racial prejudices gathered into an almost physical sense of aversion.

Suddenly he saw her standing against the garden fence in old Mr. Jackson's yard. Dick stood before her, pouring out his flatteries. Of course! The somebody with whom she had gone was Dick Jackson. His prosperity was a sham: he was sponging on his old father. What of it? Was it necessary to be prosperous in order to delude a girl like Lydia? Not at all; it was necessary only to appear so.

Len's silent contempt poured itself out over this

man and over the world which he deceived; and with that world, over the girl who formed part of it. He forgot that he himself had been deceived till his eyes had been opened by a chance remark of his father. From the moment on when he himself had seen through the man, he had expected others to see through him. If they did not, they deserved his scorn. Yes, he scorned and despised the girl!

Why, then, as he rode the binder, did he look so steadily into the bush to his left, away from Charlie and Kolm who were stooking? Why did hot, scalding tears tremble in the corners of his eyes? If he despised her, did not that settle all things? But, despising her, he despised the world; despising the world, he despised himself: his life, his future, everything. There was nothing left to work for, to live for; there was no sense in being alive, in going on with no matter what.

Yet youth was strong in him. He could not entrench himself in misanthropic isolation: build himself into a monument of moral perfection at the foot of which the writhing world seethed like a pit filled with abominations. The world was there, on a level with him, on all sides; the world was his match. He had read snatches of Byron's poems; there was a collection of German verse at home in which scathing lines of Heine's were prominent. It was the first time in his life that he became conscious of the help which art affords to a soul in labour. Byronic contempt embraced its own essence: if he, too, became despicable, the world and he could meet on equal terms.

Where had she gone? Where but to the city?

He, too, would go to the city. He would plunge into the abyss. He would probe the depths. Can the lamb sympathise with the wolf? Or the wolf with the lamb? Let us all be wolves. Then we can sympathise.

The whole trend of his thought was reversed.

In order to drown himself in work, he had accepted the offer of Mr. Crawford to help him in getting a start at high-school work. Since July he had been drilling himself in Latin and French declensions and conjugations. "Amo, amas, amat." Thus the reversal had its beginning. His, Len's picture had been sent out in the papers all over the western provinces. He had won a great prize. She would see that picture; she would know that he was not a mere country lad who could be pushed aside. She would feel sorry. Genius?

Who was he? Was he different from others? He thought of the exultation of his spirit a few months ago. He had reached for the stars—for the space of half an hour. "I shall be a university professor yet!" Of course, he would. A new driving force entered him; a new buoyancy. If nothing else, she should feel sorry for what she had done. One day they would meet. If she was lost to him, they could weep together over what might have been!

Once more he felt launched on the road. Every step brought him nearer to a distant goal: it was a physical thing which loomed in the distance. The harder he worked, the sooner would he reach it!

At last they stacked; and harvest was finished.

One day Len made his last call on Mr. Crawford who looked now so old, so old. He had recently had word of the death in action of his two sons. All the more did he seem to love Len. He wrote for him two letters of introduction to former pupils of his, both living in the city. He repeated his old admonishings: "Never give up!"

A day or two later it happened that Len and Charlie were hauling hay from a meadow west of the farm. The last load which the slow-plodding oxen drew home had been loaded in the dusk of the coming night. Charlie was sleepy. His head sank on Len's shoulder. Suddenly, half overcome with drowsiness, he flung an arm, hugging his brother to him.

"Len," he whispered, "don't you think Helen's a heavenly name?"

Len started. "Don't talk nonsense!" he said. But a strange tenderness for this boy who had but yesterday been a child welled through him.

The last day which he was going to spend at home appeared, a Sunday. In the afternoon the Dicks called, bringing Helen.

The parents were both young people themselves, strong and healthy, and agreed on all things of life. Len watched them. Whenever a question was addressed to one of them, they consulted by a look before either answered. Mrs. Dick carried a baby a few months old. A boy of ten never left her, holding on to her skirts.

Helen, the oldest, an exceedingly bashful and pretty girl, of somewhat over sixteen, tall for her

age, and given to blushes, had stayed behind, in the yard, with Charlie, when the visitors entered. Between them, there had been an air of collusion.

After awhile Len left the house and looked about. There was nothing to be seen of the pair. But somewhere in the bush behind the yard Rover barked. Without any particular thought Len followed the direction of the sound which led him to the bush trail along the fields.

Helen and Charlie were sitting together, there. Len thought of Charlie's words, spoken a few nights ago on the load of hay. Those two were undoubtedly growing towards each other. Come to think of it, there were only two astonishing things about the affair: how they met and how Charlie, almost a man, should be still so much of a child. An overpowering desire to spy upon them invaded Len.

He saw them quite suddenly as he rounded a bend in the trail.

Helen was sitting on the usual seat of wanderers in the bush, a fallen log; Charlie was lying on his back at her feet and shying stones into the stubble field.

The dog, watching Charlie, jumped and barked till he threw and then ran after the missile; but when he had found it, he did not bring it back; he merely sniffed at it and returned from his chase, looking silly. Both Helen and Charlie laughed at him; and he, embarrassed and half angered at their laugh, in the way of dogs, barked, wagging his tail

and lying down, his head on his outstretched front feet.

Neither boy nor girl were self-conscious now. They did not seem to have gone beyond taking pleasure in each other's company. Then Charlie uttered some nonsense; Helen laughed; but there was a sudden shyness in the sound.

Len, in approaching, made a quite unnecessary noise to call attention to his presence.

"Hello," Charlie sang out, "here comes big brother."

That, too, seemed a capital joke; for Helen laughed at it.

The dog came to lick Len's hand. "Hello!" Len greeted the girl.

Blushes came and went through her white face as she returned his greeting.

"Has your father started cutting?" Len asked, though he knew all about it from the mouth of that father himself.

"He has finished," she replied.

Charlie rose from the ground and frowned fiercely. It was clear, he considered Len's presence as an unjustifiable intrusion. Looking at Helen, he laughed. Then he spoke grandiloquently, "Big brother! Big, hairy brother!"—With a touch on Len's downy chin.

Len was half inclined to resent this; but, seeing Helen laugh, he preferred to join her.

"I have the honour of submitting a problem to you," Charlie went on. "Two is company. Three is a crowd. We are three."

"There is a remedy, isn't there?" Len replied.

"A dead sure remedy."

"How would it be, then, if you took yourself off?"

Helen laughed.

Charlie bent down for a stone. "Big brother," he said as he shied it over the field, "you go east; and I shall go west, taking Helen along. No need for bloodshed."

Len smiled. "No need indeed. I was going west myself. I want to look at the other field."

"Then we shall stay where we are," Charlie said to Helen.

Again she answered this sally by a blush and a laugh.

Len went on.

"Len," Charlie sang after him. "I didn't mean it."

"Don't worry," Len said.

The incident seemed to place Len still more in a category by himself. During the musings of the next half hour he arrived at a strange conclusion. They started with a feeling of instability in himself: as though his usual centre of gravity had shifted; as though, if he shared a common humanity with those of his family, he did not rest his weight on it; or, if he tried to do so, as if he must inevitably fall. He did not fit into his surroundings any longer: his aims were different aims.

Helen? She was the natural mate for Charlie; she was exactly the girl he, Len, would have picked for him; she was like her mother; and her mother was

a peerless mate for her husband: cool, chaste, competent in a limited sphere: the Dicks never had made the mistake of over-capitalising a pioneer homestead as his, Len's father had done; as the Hausmans were doing and so many others.

He, Len, was uprooted. Lydia was not what he had thought her to be. Was she lost to him? Lost or not, she had given him the data for an ideal after which he must strive though he knew he could never find it. Perhaps he would be a celibate; for, though he might meet with a woman who was all he demanded, he would no longer recognise her unless she came in Lydia's guise. What was it that bound him to this girl who had left him? A common curiosity about life in its primal aspects? The desire to see and to know even though seeing and knowing might precipitate him and her into the abyss. Yet—he had seen in Lydia what she was not. Coolly, deliberately, in a purely geometric fashion, he tried to explain to himself what had happened to him. He had seen certain points that belonged to a certain figure. Through them, he had drawn a figure of his own which did not coincide with the real figure; and to this imaginary figure—a product of his mind and soul—he had enslaved himself. Therefore he would have to go through life incomplete. For, do what he would, the data from which he had constructed his ideal proceeded from her who was lost to him.

He was in a white-clouded mood. The world as it was did not agree with the world as it should be; he forgave it for being what it was; but he for-

gave it sadly. He could not expect that things should come up to his expectations. He, being the apex of creation, looked back on its lower manifestations and saw all the previous errors; in a moral sense, he could have made a better piece of work of it!

If there was, below these thoughts, an uncomfortable realisation of their inadequacy, it was suppressed. Were they not founded on a basis broader than the experience of all those whom he knew? Had he not seen the world? A camp in the bush is as truly an epitome of the whole as anything else. Is it? Woman was omitted from it, except for the distorting mirror of tales and the woman at the boarding house. He would test and correct his view of the world by a comparison in the city. But it was not from the slenderness of the basis of fact on which his judgment of the world was built that the uncomfortable feeling sprang; for he remained unconscious of it. It sprang from the hidden knowledge that in his reconstruction of the past there was a fundamental flaw. He knew that, since his return from camp, he had approached Lydia, not with the heights but with the depths of his being. Not the uppermost, but the nethermost strata of his essence had been the bridge between them. If guilt there was, they were equally guilty. This, had he pursued his thought, would have been its conclusion.

Next morning, he set out for the city, walking, as Joseph had done. Threshing operations were in full swing in the open prairie; and he expected to work his way as he went. He would have liked to swing east, in order to follow the shores of the lake

which had been a fairyland to him since boyhood; but there he would be in the bush; and duty demanded that he reach the country of the southern farms as soon as he could. He went straight south.

He had dinner at Lindstedt's place and slept at night in a stook, in a field a few miles north of Balfour.

In the grey of the following morning he crossed the bridge into town. The streets were still deserted; the whole place breathed an air of sleep. Beyond the bridge, hotel and drugstore; a crossing of roads; three elevators to the left; two straight ahead; a mill built of concrete.

Len turned south. The stations of rival railways close together; to the left, a residential quarter clustered on the bank of the Muddy River. And, as he went on, he was between fields again. The town was an incident, casual, of small importance. The road lay ahead. To the left, the sun rose crimson from greyish vapours ill defined.

He was on the road; and the road was lonely.

At home, Charlie was milking now, shivering in the morning chill as he sat down, in the lot, between the great beasts, the two of them that were left. His mother stood over the stove, glad of the heat which it gave. And his stepfather, perhaps, looked out from the door of the barn and thought, "Where is he now?"

Well, he was swinging along the dusty road, munching the last piece of bread he had taken from home, his bundle slung over his shoulder. An odd feeling came over him that, as he put mile after mile

between himself and that home of his childhood, he was severing his real connection with it forever; not of his own free will, but driven by that force which rules our lives.

Chapter IV

THE CITY

On a frosty November morning Len had his first sight of the city. The accident of finding work had taken him from the plains of Grand Pre north so that he had half circled the metropolis before he approached it. He was about eighteen miles north of it when he wound up with his farm work. Threshing had been finished the night before; and with daybreak he had started out, reaching the brow of a hill at sunrise. To his right, a group of enormous buildings lowered over the plains: the great prison.

At the very horizon to the south, a broken skyline showed where this centre of western Canada rose. A snow-white plume of smoke and steam blew east in a sharp west wind. His heart swelled within him. That city meant much. Knowledge perhaps; or opportunity; but, as likely, doom and death. With great strides he wound down the slope.

At sundown he entered the streets and soon found a lodging with a kindly, big, and invalid lady in a street of the north end. Tired as he was, he went out to see what could be seen of the city at night.

Huge, yellow street cars thundered past him in the middle of the drive-way; automobiles glided

along in unbroken streams; the entrances to moving picture halls blared their light at him; and as he went south, an ever increasing current of humanity seemed to engulf him.

He came to a place where the great thoroughfare—lined, here, with shops that bore foreign inscriptions—dipped down to a subway below a railway station. Enormous arc-lights threw their domes of visibility aloft like luminous cowls into an atmosphere murky with steam and smoke, and against buildings that seemed to tower one above the other. A train rumbled by overhead.

Len stopped and stood, watching the lights that seemed to be shifting about as the convoluted clouds of steam into which they fell moved and whirled. His heart sank within him: intelligences more than human must be directing this chaos if order evolved out of it. He was a grain of sand on a beach over which superior beings walked, crushing and grinding him unconcernedly.

Beyond the subway, the brilliancy of the illuminations redoubled. Fiery legends, stationary or periodically changing and shifting, traced themselves into the vacant air above the roofs of the buildings.

He thought of his first experience with a train. A year ago! No more! He had learned to smile at the child he had been. Yet, conquer the city? This city every inhabitant of which had recently looked at his picture in the papers? Here he stood; nobody recognised him. Courage failed him to go on; and he turned back.

Next morning, after a restless night, disturbed

by the thousandfold mysterious noises of the never-sleeping city, he took stock of himself. Twice he had sent thirty dollars home. And he had thirty left, a great sum. Yet, two or three times, in his wanderings, he had spent a whole dollar in a day. Threshing wages were not going to continue. Could he hope to find work in this place where the simplest problem was solved in a complicated way?

He counted his money. There were twenty-four dollars left out of thirty; and his rent was paid a week in advance. Panic seized him. In that room of his there were a bed, a dresser, a wash-stand, a little table, a chair. He did not need all that. But there was nothing simpler to be had. Poor people did not seem to exist in this gutter of the country's wealth. Yet, his lodging was only a hall bed-room of the kind with which thousands of gay clerks are barely satisfied.

Go home? He could not acknowledge defeat. The train? Would this city prove to be as harmless? Strange to say, there was one trifling point which, more than others, shook his confidence when he thought of it: last night he had found himself unable to extinguish the electric light in his room.

He dressed and went out, leaving the light still burning.

It was cold and wintry, the streets still dark. Main Street looked singularly desolate under the bluish arc-lights. Now and then a motor car flashed by, its curtains closed. The few people who were abroad wore heavy, great-collared overcoats; white clouds were blowing from their mouths. Half in self-pity,

half in irony he looked down at himself: he was encased in a new, stiff suit of overalls, his shoulders squeezed into that famous old mackinaw coat which did not reach to his hips any longer and which was bursting in a dozen seams. He owned a pair of leather mitts, cotton-lined; but he had left them in his room. He shivered and dug his hands into the side-pockets of his coat so that his elbows, sticking out, gave him the appearance of a hump-back. For awhile he stood at a corner, lost, disconsolate.

A huge man in a fur coat, with a number strapped to his sleeve, his head covered with a wedge-shaped fur cap, strolled leisurely by. Len felt his eye resting on himself, and his feeling of discomfort reached a climax. He set out to cross the great street.

Following the opposite sidewalk, he turned south. Big, box-like buildings alternated with squeezed-in, small shops.

Suddenly a huge sign, black on white, caught his eye like a greeting. "D. R. L. & W. Co." And below, in five-foot letters, "Lumber, Wood, and Coal." This sign occupied the slanting corner of a huge, level yard surrounded by a board-fence.

Len felt as if he had met an old friend. As he peered through the gate, he half expected to see the "camp boss" stepping out of some building. But nothing stirred in the deserted yard.

As he stepped back, his eye fell on a little blackboard by the side of the gate. "Teamsters wanted. Apply at office."

Teamsters? Where was the office?

He skirted the board-fence and came to a little

building, strangely small in this environment. On its wide window it bore, in gold letters, the same inscription as the sign at the corner. He stopped and tried the door. It had a glass panel; and on it, too, there was a gold-lettered inscription, "Hours 9 to 12 and 2 to 5."

Involuntarily he looked at the sky to see what time it might be.

Walking briskly, he went on. Again he came to the subway, and it held no terrors. He had thought of the waiting room at the station.

Above him, a red-brick building towered into the night. Beyond, a park-like space was set into the street. The lower part of the façade of the station glittered with glass and brass.

A huge dome-like hall, with rows upon rows of dark-wooden seats; a line of wickets; a news-stand; and a great clock in the wall, its hour-hand pointing to the V. Four hours to wait: he felt as the man who fell among thieves must have felt when the Levite went past him. Yet he sat down.

At nine o'clock sharp he was at the office of the D. R. Company.

All sorts of doubts had come to assail him.

In front, at the curb, a huge truck of coal stood drawn up, hitched with a team of magnificent Clydes. A man in working-clothes, black with coal-dust, stood by the door.

Just then a gentleman arrived, unlocked the door, and entered, followed by the swarthy teamster. Len waited.

The teamster reappeared, pulling on his mitts,

and climbed up on the load. As he drove away, turning to the south, Len followed him, now fast, now slowly. He was going to see what this teamster would do with his load, thus to learn whether he was equal to the work himself.

At the next crossing, the truck turned west. To Len this seemed an adventurous undertaking; for by this time street cars and motor cars followed each other in unbroken succession. But the teamster seemed quite unconcerned.

They threaded side streets, narrower and quieter than Main Street. At last the truck stopped in front of a house. The teamster climbed down from his load and went to the backdoor. When he returned, he drove on till he reached a lane. Two more turns; and he entered a back yard, opened a lid in the side of the house—it was a coal-chute—backed his truck against it, and, by a number of manipulations, tilted the hopper of the wagon so that, with a clatter, the coal ran out. Part of it entered the chute; the rest was spilt on the ground. The man reached for a shovel and threw the spilt coal into the chute. At last, with grimy fingers, he drew a slip of paper from the breast pocket of his overalls and rang the bell at the door. A lady appeared, signed the paper, and handed it back.

Again Len was dogging the wagon and followed it for more than an hour. In the outskirts of the city they came to an enormous yard where a track of the railway ran up a high trestle spur, sixty feet above the ground. Beneath it coal lay in piles forty feet high; and dozens of trucks, similar to the one

he had been following, stood backed against these piles. Three, four were coming in empty; and as many left, filled up, at every moment. A man with a bunch of papers in his hand was running to and fro on a platform at which the departing loads were weighed and despatched. All about, gay banners of smoke, white, grey, and black, were blowing east from a dozen smoke-stacks bristling into the blue of the sky. The sun shone down on it all: the same sun that shone down on forest and field.

Len hailed one of the departing teamsters and was invited to climb up on the load. At four o'clock, he went to the office and was at once engaged as a member of the company's teaming force, at wages of three dollars a day.

For a few days he was attached to the truck of another driver, so as to give him a chance to become familiar with the lay-out of the city. He bought a map and studied it at night, taking long walks to interpret it correctly. Within a week the work had become a routine.

The city no longer daunted or awed him. It amused him, instead. What amused him was the seeming futility of most of its pursuits; he had not yet become critical enough to see their serious side. As during the first months in the lumber camp, he lived by himself, without friends or acquaintances: in the city, but not of it.

As in the camp, his mind was turned towards study. He had two letters of Mr. Crawford's to deliver. Twice, during the first Sunday, he made an attempt at delivering one of them.

He went to the address indicated on the envelope. It was in one of the residential streets of the better class, far in the west end. The house was large, set back in a well-treed lot; it was built of red brick, with a roof of green concrete tile, a curving driveway leading up to a roofed entrance. The place breathed an aristocratic aloofness which seemed to repel him. He went by without entering the grounds.

An hour later, when he had once more screwed up his courage, he returned. This time he did not stop to consider but boldly entered. He wore the "store suit" bought at McDougall. His work having accustomed him to do so, he rang at the backdoor. A young lady in black, with a small white apron, opened and asked for his errand. He stammered the name of Mr. Crawford's former pupil. "Mr. Pennycup isn't at home. He's at church, conducting his Bible Class." Len stammered an excuse and turned away. The young lady, scanning him from head to foot, had hardly been able to suppress a smile. He made no attempt to renew the call.

Then, early in December, one evening, the card handed him by the despatcher bore Mr. Pennycup's address. In going there, he made a slight detour, passed through the street of his lodgings, and fetched the letter, writing his own name and address on the back of the envelope. An hour later he was in the backyard of 254, Alexandra Street.

Chance favoured him; for, as he rang the bell at the backdoor, a medium-sized, fastidiously dressed

man of forty appeared, thrusting his sharp-featured head through the door.

"Well, yes," he said at sight of Len. "I wonder, young man, whether you would come down into the basement for a moment. Bring your shovel, please. The chute is choked up."

Len was led through a white-tiled kitchen where the young lady in black recognised him with wide eyes; through the back of a corridor which gave him a glimpse of a carpeted hall in front; and thence down a stairway into the cellar.

Mr. Pennycup led the way, shaking out his cuffs as he arrived at the bottom. "Now there, you see," he said, pointing into the coal bin, with an exaggerated swing of his arm. He made the impression as though he were gathering for a leap, his hips and shoulders being in a permanent state of tension; and as he spoke, he raised himself on his toes. But he was cheerful and polite; too much so, perhaps; he was trying to treat Len as a sort of human being.

"Now," Mr. Pennycup said after a minute or so, "that's fine. That will do splendidly. Sincerely obliged to you, young man. Might I ask you to accept . . ." fingering a small coin.

Len straightened his back. "You are Mr. Pennycup?" And, when the other's amazed look betrayed that he was, "I have a letter for you from Mr. Crawford."

"Crawford?" Mr. Pennycup balanced himself on the balls of his feet and shot the cuffs of his shirt-sleeves forward, in the motion of receiving the message. "Not John Adam surely? Well, well! What

do you think about that? You don't mean it, young man, do you?"

All this was very finely said; the fiction that Len was a human being like Mr. Pennycup himself was almost kept up. The master of the house opened the letter, stepped to one of the dusty electric bulbs to read it, and allowed the envelope to flutter to the floor.

"Well, well," Mr. Pennycup said, folding the letter. "I dare say you are busy on week-days. Let me see. How would Sunday suit you? Next Sunday afternoon at five o'clock. We'll have a cup of tea in the library. Yes, Sunday at five. We'll have a nice chat."

"All right," said Len and made for the stairway.

Mr. Pennycup followed him to the kitchen door, smiling a strange smile as he nodded his farewell.

On Sunday, at five o'clock sharp, Len, clad in his store suit and a new, short sheep-skin coat, rang the bell of the backdoor.

The young lady in black opened, looked at him, and said half humorously, "When you don't deliver coal, you should ring at the front, Mr. Sterner."

In spite of himself Len reddened.

"This way, please." And the brisk young lady led the way to the hall. A slide door to the right was pushed back, and Mr. Pennycup emerged, reaching out his hand with a great show of cordiality.

"Well, well, there you are. Come right in. Put your coat anywhere."

Len entered a lofty room which, from ceiling to floor, was lined with book-shelves. A desk, flanked by revolving book-stands, occupied one corner. Deep, leather-covered chairs stood about at various angles. From the tall, curtained windows, the subdued light of a wintry evening fell into the room. Mr. Pennycup pressed a button in the wall near the door; and from four frosted globes in the ceiling the room was flooded with a diffused radiance which was singularly soft to the eyes.

"Sit down, Mr. Sterner," said the host. "Make yourself at home. I shall be delighted, delighted indeed, to hear from my old teacher." He was closing the curtains by pulling tasselled cords. Before he sat down, he pressed the button of a bell in the frame of the door. "And now," as he subsided into one of the low, deep chairs, "tell me, please. The letter, I see, is dated from McDougall. Is that a town? Is he teaching there?"

"No," Len said; and, as briefly as he could, he gave an account of how and where Mr. Crawford lived.

Mr. Pennycup laughed. "That sounds like him. He was always queer. I have been told—I don't know of my own knowledge; my interests lie along literary lines—that at one time, years ago, he might have had almost any kind of preferment in academic work, as a university teacher of biology. An offer was made, so I understand, and declined. I have not seen him for . . . oh, a good many years. And you tell me, he's been teaching in a one-roomed country school?"

Len had nothing to say. It seemed strange indeed.

"Well," Mr. Pennycup went on, "John Adam Crawford will leave his mark somehow. And you were his pupil? You live in that district?"

At this moment the door opened; and the young lady from the kitchen wheeled a tea-wagon in, glittering with glass, silver, and thin-shelled china.

"Very good," Mr. Pennycup said. "Thanks, Minnie. Thanks."

And, shooting out the snow-white cuffs of his shirt, Mr. Pennycup busied himself pouring tea and offering his young, embarrassed guest a plate with diminutive sandwiches. Then, as though recollecting himself, he went on. "Eh? Yes. Well, well! Let us talk of yourself. I am most anxious to understand just what my old friend John Adam expects me to do. He speaks in the highest terms of you. Terms, in fact, which would sound extravagant to anyone who does not know him. I hesitate about repeating them. I know your present occupation. I became aware of it the other day. In just what way could I be of service?"

"I don't know. Mr. Crawford mentioned that you are a teacher."

Mr. Pennycup gave a short laugh. "I don't do any teaching at all. I haven't done any for quite a number of years. I am engaged in the administration of what is probably the largest high school in the west. I am more of an employment agent than a teacher. We graduate hundreds of young people every year. They go out into life; and we try to establish them. My personal contact with them is

of the briefest. Through the members of the staff, of course. . . . By directing; by submitting suggestions to the authorities. . . . Just what are your plans?"

"I don't even know that I have any plans. I should like to make use of my spare time."

"Night school!" Mr. Pennycup became pensive. "But the classes which we conduct at night are elementary. I understand you have passed your entrance examinations?"

"I have even read quite a little beyond. I have taken some French and Latin."

"You have? Well, how about continuing your reading course? You are under a necessity of making your living?"

"Yes."

"And could you not—excuse me if I seem to presume; I am actuated by the desire to further your plans—could you not try to make it in a more genteel occupation? I mean by other than manual labour?"

"I don't know. Before I came to the city, I worked in threshing. Here, I took the first job that was offered."

"Wisely, no doubt. But I fancy it must be tiring."

"Not as tiring as work on the farm. I have definite hours."

"Hm!" Mr. Pennycup mused sympathetically. "On the farm it is from dawn to dark, eh?"

"And longer. Not that I mind it. If I had had my choice, I should have stayed on the farm; at least so long as Mr. Crawford stayed."

"But you had no choice?"

"We lost our horses last summer," Len explained. "I undertook to pay for a team of oxen."

"I see. I see. Yes, yes. I understand. How are conditions up in your district? Pretty good? I mean, on the whole. I understand yours is a special case. Are the farmers prosperous?"

"Not very. It is a pioneer district."

"Ah yes!" Mr. Pennycup deposited his cup. "The rural problem! I have often wondered what could be done. Have you books there? A circulating library? Do lecturers come out in university extension work? Nothing, eh? Life must be dreary. The emptiness of it! The terrible emptiness! Stale, monotonous, dreary!"

Len felt a strange revulsion. This man antagonised him.

Mr. Pennycup rose to his feet, took a turn through the room, and stopped. "Don't you think there is only one solution? The English way."

Len looked blank.

"The gentleman farmer. The man who owns or rents the land and manages the business, hiring the actual labour done."

"We'd be labourers instead of farmers," Len said.

"Perhaps." Mr. Pennycup was struck by the astuteness of the remark.

"I doubt whether we'd like it."

"Coolies!" Mr. Pennycup exclaimed. "Cheap labour is the problem. Why not import a few hundred thousand coolies? The land has to be cultivated. Let the white man manage; let the yellow man toil!"

Len drew the strange conclusion that this educated man was a fool. "We don't complain," he said at last. "We want nothing but equal opportunities with the people who live in cities."

"Ah, yes. We are getting away from the topic. Suppose I could do something for you in this way that I helped you to find work along different lines?"

"Would there be more money in it?" Len asked.

"Ultimately."

"But not immediately? Then it would not help me at present."

"Understand me," Mr. Pennycup cried. "I wish to do what I can. But to tell you the truth, I don't quite see . . ."

"You cannot indicate to me how I might get help in working my way through the first two high-school grades during the winter?"

"Not unless you do it by private study. It would be very hard. If it is books you need, there is the public library."

"I have a letter to Dr. Lockhart."

"The very man!" Mr. Pennycup exclaimed. "He will do all he can."

Len rose.

"Another thing," Mr. Pennycup went on. He was clearly desirous to do what was in his power short of committing himself to any expenditure of time or money. "I am a member of various associations and committees. There are public lectures given by university men. All you need to do is to watch the public prints. If you happen to pass

through Park Street, step into the vestibule of the Arts Building. A list of all lectures to be delivered is posted there. Other lectures are put on by other organisations. I shall be delighted to send you tickets. Will you leave me your address?"

Len felt for a pencil.

Mr. Pennycup handed him one, gold-mounted, and drew a sheet of paper forward on the desk.

"I've been delighted," he said, balancing himself on his toes and shooting out his cuffs. "Delighted, I assure you. Drop in again and report your progress."

Awkwardly Len found his way into the hall, shouldered into his sheep-skin, shook hands, and was in the snow-covered street.

He did not know that he was being watched from a window of the house; nor that, when he was out of sight, a sash was raised to air the library. The man who raised it, muttered to himself, "Coolies! the very thing! No real civilisation has ever existed without slavery in one form or other!"

Chapter V

THE GREAT CRISIS

ONE day Len passed one of the great high schools of the city at the very moment when school was being dismissed. He stopped his team and looked across the spacious yard. As the pupils crowded through the huge doors, two things struck him: the disproportionate number of girls among them; and the low age prevailing among the scholars.

Both facts depressed him. He had the right to attend high school. Suppose a lucky chance freed him of his economic necessities. Would he want to sit among these youngsters and imbibe at twenty what they were mastering at fourteen? Would he want to sit among these girls who belonged to a class which seemed to be above him?

Yet, theirs was not the thirst for knowledge, a vital necessity of his innermost being. Knowledge to them was a means of securing "standing"; for certain careers or modes of making a living a certain academic standing was required. He despised them.

As he drove on again, he reflected that his own life was empty and hollow. He did not object to the outward forms of his life; did not wish for better clothes, for more sumptuous meals. His work was part of the world's work which had to be done. Why should not he do his share? But in his leisure

hours, be they few or many, he wanted once more to live the life of a scholar. The flame rekindled in him. Lydia was lost. He would read, read.

Through a street canyon, between enormously high buildings, where traffic ebbed and flowed at a furious rate, he came out into the great avenue which was the city's main artery. A few doors east of the crossing was a book-store. He drove into a lane and stopped his horses.

Black as he was, he ran back, afoot, and entered the store. A fashionable customer shrank from contact with him; he paid no heed. By dint of assiduity he gained the attention of a clerk and named half a dozen text-books which, a few minutes later, he received done up in a parcel. He paid for them and returned to his team. They were texts prescribed, not for the first, but the third high-school year.

A fortnight later, before leaving his room in the morning, he pocketed Mr. Crawford's letter to the custodian of the public library. For several days he did not happen to pass the building, and he carried the letter about for a week. When at last he found time, it happened to be the noon hour. The building looked palatial in a park-like square; but Len had by this time conquered his shyness. He entered and asked a young lady for Dr. Lockhart. He was told that the doctor had gone out for his lunch; he left his letter. Two days later he called again; and again the doctor was out; but he had left word that Mr. Sterner was to be given any book he might ask for.

Len laughed. "I don't want books so much as advice on what to read."

"In what line?" the young lady asked encouragingly.

"Literature, history, anything."

"Just a moment." In a few minutes the young lady returned with a volume entitled, "History of English Literature."

Len signed a slip of paper, gave his address, asked for something to wrap the book up in, and returned to his team.

Henceforth he worked at night and in every spare moment. His exceptionally retentive memory enabled him to ponder problems in algebra, geometry, physics while driving through the less crowded streets and thoroughfares even when at work.

One of the men who shovelled coal at the yard, so Len discovered, was a French-Canadian. Tentatively, Len used, in conversation with him, a few of the French phrases which he knew. The young man gave him a bright smile. From that day on there was a secret bond between them. They managed with remarkable frequency to get together. With ever increasing intensity Len worked at his French grammar; his vocabulary increased with astonishing speed.

Life seemed to assume a new meaning, to glow in colours once more. Eight hours of work; eight hours of pleasure in pursuit of knowledge; eight hours of sleep; and sometimes one or two hours were nibbled off the latter allotment. Len wrote to Mr. Crawford about his progress.

Two or three times he attended lectures. The first one dealt with "Travel in the Roman Empire."

Lantern slides opened a new world to him; he resumed his work in Latin. The next one dealt with "Dombey and Son," giving an appreciation of the work of Dickens and analysing this particular book in detail. It steeped him in a new glow: the desire awoke to know of great writers and to visualise their work, intuitively, with a comprehensive eye, to see what they had been rather than done. The third one dealt with the starry heavens: he felt bewildered. This lecturer had given his whole life to the study of one little corner of the knowledge of the world; and he, Len, wished to embrace it all! Yet his enthusiasm and the thrill of conquest were infinitely precious to him. It would not do to dwell too much on the futility of his dreams.

Three months went by. He no longer thought of Lydia; he no longer brooded over the labyrinthine tangles of life. He lived at last.

One day he took stock. Mr. Crawford had sent him a syllabus of the studies prescribed for high-school students. In the one department which he had dreaded, mathematics, he had actually covered the whole course. He could hardly believe it. Again and again he compared the notes of the syllabus with the pages of his text-books, especially in algebra. It was true. He felt an enormous accession of power.

The following Sunday he tested himself. At the back of the text-book a series of examination papers were given. He found nothing that he could not do. So, one day, when he passed the Arts Building of the university, he felt emboldened to stop his team, in the midst of high-powered cars, and to run in.

In the huge hall from which two broad flights of steps ran up, he saw a door marked "Registrar," with a direction, "Walk In." He followed this summons and faced a young lady—all things seemed to be done by young ladies these days. She looked startled as she saw his coaldust-blackened face.

But he had considerable practice, by this time, in addressing the most disconcerting young ladies—maids. "Pardon me," he said, "I should like to get some information."

"Yes?" she smiled sweetly.

"I have heard a person can enroll for university courses without attending?"

"As an extramural student?"

"Extramurally, yes. What is required for that purpose?"

"Matriculation standing."

"Standing? If the person has the necessary knowledge?"

"How can he show knowledge without proving his standing? Have you passed high-school examinations?"

"No. I have passed my Entrance. First in the province."

"Oh?"

Len, with humorously exaggerated pride, produced the paper in which his picture had appeared.

In the background a grey-haired, erect man passed from one room to another. He had caught a word or two of the conversation. The young lady turned and looked at him. "Mr. Greig," she said, "have you a moment to spare?"

Mr. Greig lent a kindly ear. "You will have to pass examinations," he said.

"There is no way of dispensing with that?"

"None. If you know the work, there is no reason to wish it, either. You can write on part of them in June; on the remainder in September. Then you can enroll for the fall term in October. I'll give you a calendar which will explain the requirements in detail."

"Thanks," Len said, took the proffered pamphlet, and left.

All about, the life of the great city pulsed. Len felt as though he were living like a hermit on a desert isle. "I shall be a university professor yet!" When, a year later, he looked back on this time of his life, it struck him how near he had been to his goal.

Had he turned his back on all this? Had he deliberately given up the studies which had made him happy? No. Some other power had taken command and hurled him out of his orbit into a different world.

Several things coincided to bring that result about. For one thing, he caught a cold. For Len, a cold was always associated with fever. Fever made him light-headed, reckless. And the very day when this condition was at its height, he had an encounter.

Late in the evening, he was driving back to the coal-yard to stable his team. The cinder road wound along between warehouses and sheds. Suddenly, in

front of him, he saw another truck going the same way.

On its seat sat a humped-over figure which looked familiar.

Had Len been gifted with foresight, he would have delayed in order to avoid a meeting. But for the moment he was glad to see anyone whom he knew and who came from the same part of the country as he. That man he would make "perform" for his amusement.

He trotted his horses and sang out, "Hi! Joseph!"

The other turned, stopped, and sprang to the ground. "Hello!" he said in furtive glee. "Since when have you been here?"

"Since threshing." Len smiled at the reversal in their respective positions; he felt the older, maturer, steadier of the two. "And you?"

"A month." Joseph giggled as if he had met the companion of former debauches.

"Well, let's put the horses in. We can talk on the way home."

Joseph returned to his truck and went on.

When they left the yard, a devil-may-care spirit invaded Len. He took the older man's arm; together they struck south in search of adventure. Len had never yet boarded a street car. When they did so, he displayed the air of a habitué, holding out a dollar bill to the conductor.

They found seats. "Seen the folks lately?" Len asked.

"No. I haven't been near them. I've sold my

horses and the cow. Dick's clearing for me. I make better wages working out."

Len laughed. "Too lonesome? You for the gay life, eh?"

Joseph shrugged his shoulders.

Len, feeling none of the responsibility for this man which he had felt in the lumber camp, wished to stir him up. An uncontrollable fit of laughter seized him. When they neared the street of his lodgings, he rose. "Let's wash up at my place," he said. "Then we'll go downtown. To Deer River, eh?"

They alighted. "Sure," said Joseph with a sudden grin, breaking into shrugs of devilment. "Some woman up there at Deer River!"

"You were nicely mixed up with her," Len agreed. "Drink, gambling, and women are your three long suits, eh?"

They dipped into the darkness of the side street as into a cave. It was a mild evening of the birth of spring. Foreign figures: bearded Jews and portly Greek women were standing on the steps of the little houses. From a fruit store the jabber of Italian voices came in quick staccato. In front of them, through the dark, two young fellows strode along, conversing in the finger language of the dumb.

Like a wave of hot air the intoxication of the crowded city life struck Len who had so far walked through it inviolate.

The man by his side pressed his arm. "But that was nothing. The city for me! I tell you, the women here! lots of them! Thousands!"

Again Len laughed. He had the man going.

In Len's room, Joseph gave him fifty dollars to put away. Len thrust the money into a drawer, under his shirts. In a whirlwind of hurry they tidied themselves.

Ten minutes later they were in the street again.

"Where do you eat?" Len asked.

"I've got a place," Joseph said. "With women. Come on."

Arm in arm they turned into Main Street. They went on straight ahead till they had passed the subway. Beyond, they turned east, past the station, into a quarter entirely unknown to Len. Dark side streets were lighted only by coloured bulbs on the porches of houses. Joseph turned into one of them.

"Where are you going?" Len asked, his heart pounding.

"I told you," Joseph replied tensely. He stopped in front of a house and searched for its number. Then he climbed two steps; and when he had rung the bell, a female face peered through a crack between door-frame and blind. The door was cautiously opened.

Inside, the air was heavy with scents. A frosted globe diffused a pink light. The woman who had opened the door was by no means young; her face was stiff with paint. She moved with a business-like briskness. Apparently she knew Joseph; for without word or smile she opened a door into the room opposite the entrance.

"Supper for two," Joseph said with his habitual grin and shrug.

She nodded gravely and closed the door on them.

The room was furnished like any bourgeois dining room: couch, heavy curtains, table, and six chairs. The walls were decorated with pictures of nudes.

Joseph greedily inhaled the musty smell of powder that floated on the air, baring his splendid teeth. Len felt immensely sobered.

After awhile a second woman entered, carrying table linen over her arm. She was large and stout, moving like a tower in a pink kimono. Her feet were bare in satin slippers; her face, none too young, glaring in its contrasts of artificial reds and whites: her hair was black. With an amused expression she glanced from Len to Joseph, from Joseph to Len.

"Hello, Alice," Joseph greeted her.

Without answering, she continued her scrutiny for another second. Then she nodded to Joseph. "Hello, chuck," she said in a babyish voice. "What lamb do you bring us there?"

"Friend of mine," Joseph said, putting his arm about her waist.

She pecked a kiss at his cheek and disengaged herself.

"Supper for two, the madam said. You mean for four?"

"Sure." He approached her again.

"Here!" she admonished. "Business before pleasure!" She slipped out.

She had hardly left the room when Len turned to Joseph. "I don't think I want this sort of thing."

Joseph grinned at him. "Don't be silly!"

"Are you going to stay?"

Joseph laughed. "After supper? Sure. We'll go to a picture show."

Len grasped at that. "I've never seen a picture show."

The woman returned, laying the table.

Len and Joseph watched her in silence. A girl, attired as a maid, helped with the work.

"Do I dress?" the woman called Alice asked.

"Sure," Joseph said. "We'll go to a show. Lots of time, though."

A few minutes later another girl entered, dressed like Alice though she wore stockings. She curtsied in mockery and smiled. She was pretty, fair-haired, small, and young; and she had finely-shaped limbs.

Len's heart leapt into his throat. Lydia's figure and face stood before his mind's eyes. The girl resembled her.

She, too, looked smilingly from one to the other. Then she drew a chair close to Len's and sat down. As she did so, she allowed her kimono to fall apart in front and was revealed in her undergarments, lacy, silky things.

Len felt alternately hot and cold.

She, seeing his plight, laughed and patted him on his cheek, drawing her kimono about herself.

Helplessly Len frowned and rose. But she caught him by his sleeve and drew him down again. A moment later he felt as though liquid fire were running through his body; his brain was swamped by he knew not what; his senses reeled.

The girl had sat down on his knees; her arms were about his neck; she pressed his head to her

naked bosom. Then, with a silvery laugh, she sprang up and ran out.

Once more Len rose and staggered to the door. Joseph tried to hold him; but he tore himself loose; and without noticing that he left his cap behind, he escaped into the street.

That was the last time he was to see Joseph; for the man never claimed the money he had left with Len. As a matter of fact, he became, in the course of the night, embroiled in a fight and was arrested.

Chapter VI

FEVER

LEN had been wandering the streets for hours. He did not know what was wrong. Somehow he could not find his way to where he wanted to go. Where *did* he want to go? He could not tell. He had seen Lydia, that was all he knew. He did not even remember that it had been a mere vision.

As the night wore on, he felt strangely light. Was he ill? More likely he was inspired. His thoughts raced along, sketching conceptions of seemingly vast import in snatches.

This night was a turning-point in his life.

Knowledge? Once before, in the camp, knowledge had seemed trivial; but never before had the futility of such a thing as learning been so convincingly clear to him. Life, life was everything. It seemed as though he knew very clearly just what he meant by that word "life".

He visualised his own parental homestead, Hausman's, Dick's. They were the ones that raised the food to feed the crowd of parasites!

Pennycup, Greig, the registrar of the university, the young lady at the public library: all these danced past his excited mental vision as in a kaleidoscope; they were the parasites.

He stopped and laughed. Joseph's face had flashed

upon the screen of his mind. He flung his arms wildly: *he* was a homesteader!

With an abrupt sobering of all his faculties he looked about. He was in a part of the city which he did not know. The streets were dark. Huge, box-like buildings with rows upon rows of windows, all without a light, seemed to crowd in upon him from all sides. In a sudden panic he began to run.

Ahead of him was a bridge. It seemed as though that bridge came galloping to meet him. A minute later he stopped, hugging its parapet. Below, the wide, white trough of the river lay as in a dream. A half-moon rode high in the sky. The moon!

As in a nightmare, the city seemed to sink away. An irresistible longing for the open country came over him. He wanted to leave the city behind, to tramp into the fields and the woods.

Feeling weak, he squatted down on his heels, leannig back against the concrete supports of the parapet. Feeling hot, he opened his sheep-skin. Where was the country?

Confusion invaded his brain. With his mind's eye he saw a stiff derby hat. Into it he must break three eggs, being careful that none of the white got into it, only the yolks. What do with the whites? Let them run on the pavement! The yolks he must beat with an egg-beater. Yes, that would solve the problem. Yet, it was not altogether clear. He reached for the derby hat, struggling to his feet.

He stood and looked about. Shaking his head, he wiped the sweat from his brow. "What nonsense!" he muttered. "What deuced nonsense!"

He went on and stopped again. What was it? Ah yes, he wanted to find the open road away from the city.

Certainly, yes! Where should the doubt come in? Forward march!

The short rest had refreshed him; he felt light again and stepped briskly out. Sick? Yes, he was sick. What of it? As soon as he breathed the open air of the woods, he would be well.

Again a kaleidoscopic procession of pictures flashed through his brain, like moving pictures reeled off at a tremendously accelerated pace. Lydia? There she stood, her shoulder-blades glued against a building, her head flung back, beautiful, desirable, alluring, pure! Three men stood about her, snarling. "Pack of wolves!" Len yelled.

The sound of his voice brought him to himself. Frightened, he looked back and went rapidly on.

The neck of a horse bent upward. A fire at the edge of the slough. His stepfather, gigantic, shadowy, hurling a rope . . .

In passing, a sign caught his eye. He went back and read it painstakingly as though the mechanics of reading were still troubling him. "Northern Fish Company." As he went on, he kept repeating these three words, saying them in all sorts of cadences, with varying intonations, now questioningly, now threateningly, now like an imprecation in a commination service. It was a game. At last his inflections became ironic, Byronic, pathetic like the ravings of Lear on the heath.

The lights of the great station building at the

corner of Main Street were ahead. As he reached it, he felt suddenly tired to death. The clock showed that it was late, between two and three. He was hungry; but above all he was tired.

Somehow, thence, he reached his lodgings.

Arrived in his room, he seemed quite sane. He wound and set his alarm clock and lay down on his bed without undressing.

A second later, so it seemed, the alarm went off. He shivered in the chill of his stuffy room. But he washed, searched for his cap, and, not finding it, sat down again. He saw a letter lying on his dresser, pocketed it, rose, and went out. At seven o'clock he reported at the barn to take his team out.

"Shovellers have gone on strike," the stable boss said, standing in the drive way of the huge barn as Len put the harness on the horses. "You'll have to do your own shovelling." And he gave Len a card. The first morning deliveries were always directed by him.

"All right," Len said.

As he began to shovel, he was instantly in a cold sweat. He took his sheep-skin off and stood, letting the morning breeze pass through his jeans. He was the only man who had reported so far.

He stood, leaning on his shovel. Visions invaded him.

He was riding in a palanquin, elephants crowding against him right and left. Through a mist-veiled valley he was riding down to the plains: fir trees loomed high and gaunt into the grey of dawn. Plumes nodded all about. At the head of the great

beast he was now riding, a small, white-turbaned figure in green silk breeches, with a red silk sash about his hips, was trotting along afoot, swinging his goad. He himself was the rajah, reclining on cushions, leading his men down to the plains for a raid.

The foreman spoke to him. "Are you sick?"

"No. I'm all right." In a frenzy of hurry he finished his load.

He drove to the scales.

"What did you do with your hat?" the foreman asked.

"Don't know."

"Out on a spree last night?"

"You bet," Len replied as he climbed up on his load.

As he drove out of the yard, his teeth chattered. But he thought quite clearly. "Doggone it all!" he mumbled. "I must wrest another three dollars from this swollen belly of wealth!"

He looked down on the nodding horses and lapsed. Like a moving platform, his mind seemed to slip from under him. Hours seemed to go by.

Then he came to for a moment, in a bedlam of noise. Three, four policemen were standing about his truck. Voices shouted. A bell clanged persistently. His team stood crosswise in front of a street car. He tried to sit up. He was on Grand Pre Avenue, holding up the traffic.

Then he felt himself lifted. He struggled; he sank, sank, sank. He was laid down and felt swift motion. He yelled to the horses to go faster, faster! A cool hand was placed on his head.

Chapter VII

ONCE MORE THE FARM

A MONTH or so later, having weathered an attack of pneumonia, Len insisted prematurely on being dismissed from the hospital. He had some money: arrears of wages due him and fifty dollars which he found among his laundry and the presence of which he could not explain. The same day he took the night train for McDougall.

The series of events which caused Len to depart thus suddenly had been revealed in a number of letters.

After Len's departure in the fall of the year, the crop had been threshed; its proceeds had proved sufficient, not only to cover the interest charges on the debt, but even to pay off close to five hundred dollars on capital account. But it had led to another violent quarrel between Kolm and his wife.

When Kolm and Charlie, one afternoon, were bagging the first load of wheat, standing each bag as it was filled on end in the sleigh box to be taken to town next day, Mrs. Kolm watched from the window of the kitchen in the north wall of the house. Stepfather and son came in late at night.

When supper was finished, Kolm turned to his wife and asked, "What's eating you?" for she be-

trayed her ruffled temper by throwing dishes and pans about.

"Where are you going to take that grain?" she asked.

"Where? To McDougall, of course."

"You're a fool!" she said and went into the kitchen, slamming the door.

Kolm looked at Charlie, who was by this time taking Len's place in the stepfather's confidence, and gravely winked at him.

"Search me!" Charlie said and threw himself down on the lounge.

Kolm brooded for awhile; then he rose and went to the door.

"Say," he said to his wife. "Mind telling me what's up?"

"I've told you," she snapped. "You're a fool."

"That's a well-known fact," Kolm said. "But what brings it to mind just now?"

"That wheat's the only thing we've got to sell!"

"Not altogether. There's a little barley, and some oats."

"You're dense! You haven't an ounce of brains!"

"I know, I know." Then, explosively, "What in hell are you driving at?"

She laughed. "As if there were no elevators elsewhere!"

"McDougall happens to be the nearest place; and I owe money there."

"Exactly," she said with enormous indifference. "All right. All right!"

He, pressing the two jambs of the door with his

elbows and its lintel with the top of his head, stood and stared. "You mean I can get the cash at Poplar Grove and defraud my creditors. That happens not to be my way. What good would it do? They would enquire and find out."

"This place is going to blazes anyway."

"I don't know about that."

"How are you going to make a living without cream to sell?"

"Remains to be seen. I'm going to run a store bill. It's the first time I do it. It's the first time I can. If I pay that wheat in on my debts, I'll have credit."

"And who's going to pay the store bill?"

"Len."

"Len! Do you think he'll carry you on his back all his life?"

"I don't. If I help him to get this place into shape, he'll help me to get established on mine. It's between him and me."

"That wheat'd make a nice first payment on a good business in town."

"I am not going to run like a hare from the hounds."

"You talk of socialism. Here's a chance to even the score."

"Socialism isn't dishonesty. I'll hold my head up wherever I go."

"You're a fool!"

"Listen," he yelled. "I told you I'd quit if I can't make it a go within a year. Stick to your bargain, will you?"

"Have it your way," she said, subsiding. "But when I go, I go for good!"

"I won't keep you," he answered, went out, and slammed the door so that the house shook.

Charlie, in the adjoining room, shrugged his shoulders. These quarrels left him unconcerned. That was the difference between him and Len. He had an unbounded confidence in himself. He was going to farm. He, too, relied on Len. Len would help him to hold the farm even though his parents left it! There was nothing sentimental in his attachment to the place. He had been born there; had grown up there; he could not imagine any other kind of life; he would never leave it. He was planted and rooted there.

Len's remittances amounted to eighty dollars by Christmas. Kolm took the money orders to Neuman, the man from whom they had bought the oxen, endorsed them over to him, and reduced the debt on the team. Then Kolm made his big mistake. He expected another hundred and fifty dollars from Len before seeding. Instead of keeping some money against the day the Jew would "shut down on him," he thought of paying the whole of the debt due for the ox-team, in order to save eight percent. For three more months in succession he endorsed Len's remittances over to Neuman, clearing the team. Two more remittances would clear the store bill.

Meanwhile he cut timber and cleared the usual strip of land. Last year's cutting lay ready, seasoned,

to be sold. But he could not haul without horses; oxen are slow.

The next time flour, sugar, tea were needed, Kolm, having gone to town, was asked by the Jew to come to the office. He was shown his account, amounting to eighty dollars, and asked what he intended to do about it.

What did they expect a farmer to do about a bill in spring?

"Do you own your land?" the Jew asked.

"No."

"You see," the Jew said cryptically.

"I don't. I don't see at all!"

The Jew began to speak of hard times, of the tightness of the money market. Kolm must pay up. The end of the war had made things harder instead of easier.

"I can't," Kolm said. "I'll pay half of it within a week or two."

"Give me a note," the Jew said, "signed by yourself and your step son."

Kolm brooded. "All right."

The note was made out. He sat down to drop a line to Len, explaining and enclosing the note. When he returned from the office to the store, he was politely but firmly told, by one of the young men, that he might have whatever he could pay for in cash.

There was not much in this to feel alarmed at. Yet sombre misgivings would not be laid. Not a word did Kolm say to his wife to explain his failure

to bring what she had asked for. She accepted it with an ironic smile which was hard to bear.

He waited a day to rest his oxen and then went to Polar Grove. There were two stores there: one kept by an Armenian Jew who was trying to conduct a cash-and-carry business; the other, by an old trader in furs and those goods which Indians buy; his trade with a few of the white settlers was a side line with him.

Kolm called at the latter store, stated his case frankly and asked for credit till threshing time. The trader, a small, bearded, cautious, silent man, nodded to a packing case, inviting Kolm to sit down. Then he disappeared through a door behind which he used the telephone. Kolm shrugged his shoulders; he knew what that meant.

When the trader re-entered, he began to weigh out sugar into paper bags.

Kolm rose. "Well?" he asked.

The trader, grey and dark, shrugged his shoulders. "I can do nothing for you," he said in an almost hostile voice.

Kolm went out, cursing himself for a fool at not having known that traders are traders and play a safe game.

A week went by; and a second week. Not a word from Len. Provisions at home reached the ebb of famine.

Kolm returned to McDougall. He took a load of wood: that would mean four dollars; enough for a week.

At the store, the old Jew faced him. "Do you have the note?"

"No. The boy hasn't answered yet."

"He doesn't want to."

"He may be sick."

The Jew gave him a contemptuous look. "It is a *refus,*" he said, pronouncing the word in the French way.

Kolm looked blank. "I want a half bag of flour," he said, throwing down his four dollars.

The Jew raised a finger to one of his sons; and when the young man came, smiling urbanely, the old man said briefly, "Put a half bag of flour into Kolm's sleigh." Then, looking at Kolm, he nodded to the office.

Arrived there, he sat down and filled out two notes which he pushed over to Kolm to sign. One was for forty, the other for forty-two dollars.

Kolm frowned. "Doggone you," he said, "make that one fifty and give me a whole bag of flour and some sugar and tea."

Without a word the Jew complied.

When Kolm returned to the store, the Jew preceding him, the latter touched a bag of flour with his finger and placed a twenty-pound package of sugar and a pound of tea on the counter. Kolm bent down, shouldered the bag, picked the packages up, and strode out. The half bag of flour he placed on the steps of the store and then slowly drove off with his team of oxen.

On Saturday, mail-day, Charlie went to Jackson's for the mail. Kolm was waiting at the gate

when he returned. No letter from Len. Instead, there was a letter from the bank at McDougall, notifying him that two demand notes were awaiting his attention within three days.

On Monday Kolm went back to town.

"I know," said the manager of the bank. "It's a dirty shame. I wish you had consulted me before signing those notes. Do you own anything on which there is no lien?"

"My oxen," Kolm said. "They are really Len's. That was the understanding. But I have nothing to show for it."

"He could sue them out," the banker said. "Sure he hasn't gone back on you?"

Kolm shrugged his shoulders. "I'd stake my life on that."

"It's a dirty shame. But your only hope is with Baum himself. He can withdraw the notes. Otherwise we have to protest; and he'll seize the oxen."

Kolm rose and left. He went to the store.

"What dirty trick are you trying to play?" he asked without preamble.

The old man raised his eyebrows.

"I told you I can't pay. I gave you the notes. Isn't that enough?"

"Notes are worth nothing unless they are paid."

"I'll pay in the fall."

"You'll pay them now."

"Doggone it," Kolm roared. "I have nothing."

"You've got the oxen, fully paid up."

Kolm laughed mirthlessly.

"Give me one of them; I'll cancel the bill."

"Might as well take both."

"I will," said the Jew. "Tomorrow. There will be costs. Give me one today, and I'll give you forty dollars in cash."

"What good is one ox to me?"

The Jew raised his hands, palms forward.

"Quit that!" Kolm shouted, angered by the Semitic gesture. "What is your game?"

"Don't mind if I tell you. I have the mate to one of yours in the shed."

"Oho!" Kolm laughed. "That's it, is it? I'll queer that for you. You won't get that ox!" He turned and left the store.

Half an hour later he was driving a bargain with a cattle-dealer at the livery stable. He sold the oxen for two hundred and seventy-five dollars, received the cheque, and went to the bank.

"The dirty brute!" Kolm said to the manager. "I queered his game. I sold the team and got the cash."

Mr. McClung, the banker, discharged the notes. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm through," Kolm said savagely. "I quit."

The banker whistled. "There will be a sale," he said.

"Let there be. I'm through. Good-by."

Ten minutes after that he hired himself out at the livery stable, on wages of forty-five dollars a month, the hostler to move him into town. He rented a small shack beyond the track, at eight dollars a month, paying one month's rent in advance.

His sleigh he left at the livery barn: it was among the things on which he owed money.

At three o'clock he set out for the tramp home, carrying a hundred and eighty dollars in cash in his pocket. "That money is Len's," he muttered. "I'm hanged if I don't hand it to him as soon as I see him."

When he entered his house, at night, his wife looked white and scared. "Where are the oxen?" she asked.

"Where you'll be tomorrow night. Get busy. Pack up."

Charlie, who had heard this, "put two and two together" as he expressed it to himself. As soon as the chores were done, he slipped out. He went two miles east, to see a neighbour by name of Hahn. To him Charlie hired out for the spring work, by the day; he still trusted Len to do what would enable him to stay on the farm.

At noon, next day, a dray appeared in the yard. The Kolms were ready; within an hour all that by the law of the land could not be seized, was loaded. Not a word had been exchanged about this move between man and wife. But Mrs. Kolm, as she climbed up on the load, in shawl and antediluvian bonnet, was crying.

Charlie, tall, lank, but muscular, in shirt-sleeves and without cap, was defiant. To his surprise Kolm anticipated his refusal to leave. "You aren't coming?"

"No."

"All right, then. I won't need to worry about

what stock there is left." Suddenly, with a confidential note in his voice, he asked, "What's the idea?"

Charlie shrugged his shoulders. His defiance changed into a feeling of disconsolateness.

"Say good-by to your mother."

When the dray had gone, Charlie went through the house: the couch had been left in the living room; in the kitchen, a little table and a chair. There was also a two-lidded wood-stove, its sleeve unconnected with the black flue hole in the ceiling. The fact that Kolm had carried it down and left it seemed to betray that he had known that Charlie would stay behind. Upstairs, the boy found a pile of rusted stove-pipes; and thoughtfully he carried them down . . .

A week or so later, Len appeared on the scene. He was thin and pale. A straggling, whitish beard framed his chin and made him look twice as old as he was.

What he did not know of the happenings at Macdonald, he heard in silence from the lips of his mother who seemed no better satisfied now than ever. His stepfather handed him a hundred and eighty dollars. He went to the stable and hired a team to take him to the farm.

That farm, when he reached it, looked deserted. Stable, cow-lot, sheep-shed were empty; but the yard was littered with the usual array of half-rusted implements.

He went to the house and found nobody in kitchen or living room.

Yet, in the latter a pail stood on the floor, half filled with water, with scouring brush and mop by its side; half the floor was wet; from brush and mop a trickle of water was running over the unwetted part of the floor. Len turned to go upstairs.

In the farthest corner of the second attic room he came upon the figure of a girl, trembling, her eyes wide, her face white. But at Len's sight she flushed scarlet. It was Helen Dick.

She had grown surprisingly; she looked like a doe, pretty with youth and embarrassment.

"Hello," Len said. "Well, since you are here, you know perhaps where to find Charlie?"

"At Hahn's."

"Are you keeping house for him?"

"No. I come for an hour or so, just to keep things decent."

"I won't disturb you," Len said. "I'll send the boy who drove me out after Charlie. I'll go to the stable and wait there."

The girl blushed. "You can stay. I didn't know who it was. I don't mind you."

"All right then," Len laughed.

They went down, and Len directed the driver where to go. Helen resumed her work. "Well, well," Len said when he re-entered. "You two must be engaged to be married."

Helen laughed, brushing her hair back with the wrist of a wet hand. "Have been," she said, "since we were that high." The brush flew over the splintered boards again; soap foamed; the mop wiped it up. "You've been ill?"

"Yes, I've been ill."

"Charlie felt sure of it since you didn't write. Len wouldn't go back on me, he said over and over again."

Len smiled reminiscently. "Good boy!" he said.

"The best in the world!" Helen asserted boldly.

Len smiled. "And you're going to be married soon?"

"As soon as we can. He's eighteen. Another year . . ."

"Why wait that long?"

Helen looked up, blushing.

"The farm is his," Len said.

"His and yours."

"No," Len said. "I have thought it all out. I give him my share."

"But he can't work without horses."

"He'll have the horses."

"And the machinery."

"We'll see about that, too."

"You're a brick," Helen said after a short, surprised silence.

When the rumble of the buggy sounded across from the grade, Helen rose as if to take flight.

"Don't run," Len said.

"Sure," she replied. "Charlie and I meet at night. Once a day is quite enough till . . ." And again she blushed.

Charlie greeted Len in his characteristic way. "By golly if it isn't Len! You look like a ghost. What's the matter with you?"

Charlie was clean-limbed and strong: the beginning and starting-point of a race of farmers.

They talked matters over; and Len returned to McDougall.

There he spent a week; when he returned to the farm, he drove a team of mares; another team, of colts, was tied behind. He, being a land-owner, had credit where Kolm had had none.

Spring work was done. The brothers lived together and "bached it." The weeks flew by. In June, Kolm's creditors held a sale. Len bought the whole outfit, paying fifty cents on the dollar of what was owing on it. He had just turned twenty-one.

One day, when the last of the spring work was finished, Len went over to Jackson's. Old Mr. Jackson was ill. When he passed the school, his heart sank; he had not yet called on Mr. Crawford. He would go one day soon, he said to himself; not now. There would be a new teacher in the school for the fall term. Mr. Crawford had resigned on the score of old age.

In Jackson's yard, Len went to the pink house and knocked.

Mary opened the door. "Why, Len!" she exclaimed and grasped his hand. "I did not think you'd forget us. Father has been talking of you. Yes, you can see him. But you must not stay long."

Mr. Jackson was lying very straight in his bed, a shadow of his former self. But his voice was strong and resonant.

"Hello, young man," he said, "You've come

home, have you? I've been thinking of you. You were in the city. Going back?"

"I think so," said Len and sat down by the bed.

"Well now, do you know what caviare is?"

"No, I don't."

"Pickled fish eggs. I've eaten it once in my life. And I've had a craving for it ever since. I've been wanting to ask Mary to write you so you might see whether you could get it. Caviare, that's what they call it. You try."

"I will," Len said. "With pleasure."

"They tell me I'm going to die," the old man went on. "Well, I've lived my life. I haven't found what I wanted exactly. That you, Cathleen?"

"It's I, father, Mary."

The last rays of the setting sun cast a ruddy radiance into the room. The old man's eyes looked sunken and dull; his hands lay white and limp on the counterpane.

At a look of Mary's, Len rose.

"Yes, yes," the old man said, becoming aware of the motion. "Caviare, don't forget!"

"I won't," Len said and went out.

Downstairs, Len saw tears in Mary's eyes as she turned to him.

"I think it is cruel," she said, her voice shaking. "I know it is wicked of me to speak as I do. But I can't think any longer that God is just. So many good-for-nothings who've never tried to make a home are allowed to live; and my dad must die! The house, the whole world seems changed since the doctor said he could not get better."

"There is no hope?" Len asked gently.

"None, the doctors say. We've had a specialist up from the city. He may last three weeks or three months, he said. It's cancer."

"I'll think of the caviare," Len said.

"Don't trouble. He has asked for such things before. And when we get them, he looks at them and won't touch them at all."

Len held out his hand. "I hope he won't suffer too much."

"Thanks," Mary said. "Thanks also for coming. He has always liked you, Len."

Len hesitated. He wished to say something and searched for words. Words seemed inadequate. Suddenly he nodded, turned to the door, and went out.

A week later he returned to the city where he found work with his former employers. At harvest time he was back on the farm.

Charlie exclaimed at his sight. He was tall, thin, hollow-chested; and sometimes he could not conceal the fact that he suffered from pains in the side. He looked greatly aged and wore a long beard.

"You are not doing the right thing by yourself," Charlie said.

"Perhaps not," Len replied, thinking of how he had, night after night, walked the streets of the city until late hours.

When the grain was stacked, Charlie and Helen were married at the church in Odensee.

Len gave them a cooking-range for a wedding present; the parents of the bride equipped their bedroom; Kolm gave a kitchen table.

The next day, Charlie drove Len to Poplar Grove, whence a mixed train would take him back to the city.

During that long train ride he was obsessed by the premonition that he had seen the home farm for the last time. He had a plan. That plan must be carried out. By this time, his preoccupation with Lydia was complete and, so he felt, fatal. He must find her; and, having found her, he must redeem himself of what he now called the curse of sex. His former dreams he smiled at. Education? Education must come at an earlier or later stage. Adolescence had interfered with its elementary phases: it had been wrecked on the turbid waters of the awakened instincts of sex. The city appeared to him like a maelstrom in which the skiff of his life was caught. He refused to adapt himself to its ways; he still wore sheep-skin and overalls; but it revenged itself by holding out his doom.

PART IV. DEATH

"O Mort, vieux capitaine, il est
temps, levons l'ancre!
"Ce pays nous ennuie. O Mort,
appareillons!"

Chapter I

THE MEETING

LEN was back at his old work of draying and delivering coal. It had not seemed worth while to look for different work—work, perhaps, which involved less sudden changes from overexertion to absolute idleness in the already wintry air. This was the year 1919 when it snowed up on October 8.

He no longer read nor thought. He was absorbed in one single thing which seemed all-important.

Every night he walked the streets, ever on the look-out for a face and a figure. He felt sure that he would finally meet her.

On Main Street and Grand Pre Avenue he became a familiar sight. Young girls with painted and powdered masks—girls who had often seen him—nudged each other when they saw him and giggled. Boys who smoked innumerable cigarettes burst into guffaws and turned to look after him. Older people pressed each other's arms and said. "There is the poor man again. He looks so ill!" Policemen winked at passers-by who caught their eye, as much as to say, "Looney, ain't he?"

On Sundays, he went in the morning from church to church; from park to park in the afternoon.

Months went by. On every pay-day, when he

received his cheque, he deposited two thirds of it in the bank which operated the branch at McDougall, with directions to credit it on the notes held against him. The crop, he had been informed, had cancelled half the debt and still left enough over to provide for Charlie and Helen throughout the winter. Kolm held his "job" at the livery stable but was, in spare time, branching out as a wheelwright on his own account. In his rare letters he spoke of his determination finally to return to the bush and to work his own homestead. He hinted that even Len's mother was beginning to see that the town was no place for them. Mr. Jackson had died shortly before Christmas. The Hausmans were on the point of giving up.

As he walked the streets, Len peered into every female face.

Prosperity seemed to have flooded the city like a tidal wave. It was the time of the first adjustments after the war, when prices and, therefore, profits and wages were highest. With this prosperity had come a fever of extravagance. Fur coats and fur trimmed wraps were in vogue; jewelry shops were disgorging their treasures. Even artisan's wives and daughters were flashing rings on their fingers, with diamonds set in gold or platinum. Paint and powder concealed every face. Fashion decreed skirts reaching scarcely below the knee. The world of women seemed to have gone mad with the ostentation of sex. In midwinter they wore almost transparent silk stockings; their busts rose like flowers from the calyxes of their furry wraps. Waists were

of the filmiest kind, showing silk undergarments in the colours of the rainbow and betraying rather than concealing the breasts underneath. Shop-windows were gorgeous with silk and satins made up into drawers and vests.

Len did not criticise. He accepted it all as a fact; such was the world. But he acknowledged that this heady perfume of sex went to his own head as well. Sometimes he was shocked to find that, when he looked at this or that girl, he saw her in imagination as he had seen the girl that had sat down on his knees. At other times, he cursed himself when he found his thought travelling along such lines; and he cursed the world and all the facts of sex. Once or twice, in the darker side streets, he was accosted. He went sternly on, without stopping or listening; and always Lydia stood before his mind's eye, leaning back against a building, at bay, with three men surrounding her, sneering or imploring. Her he purified, deified in his thought.

If she had chosen the wrong path, the path of evil, whose was the fault? Is it the fault of lambs that wolves devour them? Was the thing he had seen in the north-east quarter of this city the fault of the women? He was not clear-headed enough to see that any social evil is necessarily the fault of both parties to the bargain, the victims as well as the victimisers. He answered that nobody was to blame but the men. Perhaps the truth of it was that this attitude helped him to prop up his ever-dwindling self-respect. "Look!" he could say. "I am as sorely tempted, more sorely tempted than any of you. I

do not yield!" More sorely tempted? Yes, for he was by this time convinced that overwork had brought on disease and that he would shortly die.

At other times he followed a different line of thought. He had admired Lydia. Others had done so. Her effect on them, in her ignorance of the world of men, she could ascribe to one cause only: to the power of beauty. She had been hard pressed. She resolved to cut herself free. With what in view? With what, indeed, but to make use of the power which she had discovered? Was it any wonder?

Thus he sought to justify her. He saw well enough that he was only justifying himself, his own intoxication with the thought of her. He had met her at the critical moment of his life. Her critical moment had not happened to coincide with his. Had they coincided, they would have been united forever. That such had been possible, he felt convinced; in this conviction there seemed to brood something like an adumbration of the cruelty of his fate. Whenever it arose above the horizon, as a half-recognition of possibilities thwarted, like a half-clouded moon above a dim landscape, he veered at once to the side, to a contemplation of his other aspirations. All things had come to him ill-adjusted in point of time. Had he met that girl of the brothel at the right moment, he might have loved her!

One day he thought once more of education. All systems of education were the work of blunderers. Yet willy-nilly even blunderers were under the influence of the wisdom of the ages. Millennia had proved certain periods in the lives of the young to

be best adapted for the mastering of certain things. With that fundamental arrangement pioneer conditions had interfered; they had interfered with everything else in his life!

The thought of the girl in the brothel—it was March when it came, a year after the brief intersection of their orbits—set his mind working along a new line. His quest was for Lydia. Lydia resembled that girl. Where was he more likely to run across her than at one of the picture halls of the city? All the world frequented them.

Henceforth, he waited every night before one of these halls till an out-coming stream of spectators proclaimed a recess. Mostly he stood in that gorge of light, the entrance, scanning every person issuing forth into the street. Occasionally, as he became known in these haunts of what is called pleasure, an usher would gruffly tell him to be gone. He would look at the man, out of his big, blue, sunken eyes, would step up to the ticket-vendor's glass booth, purchase his admission, walk through the crowded auditorium, looking right and left, and, with the darkening of the lights, walk out again.

April came. At the coal yard, most of the men were "laid off." Len asked to be transferred to the wood yard; his record with the company being good, his request was granted. He must not leave the city till he had been successful in his quest!

Strange to say, he was successful at last.

One evening, when he stood in the light-flooded entrance to one of the picture halls—of a warm, spring-like night—he saw a couple, arm in arm,

coming down the steps from the long corridor leading to the rear of the building.

The woman, flimsily but gaudily dressed in cheap finery, brutally painted in scarlet, white, and black, seemed to stop and to shrink at his sight; for he stood gaunt, bearded, hollow-eyed. She withdrew her arm from that of her escort, a middle-aged man, short, fat, with a smirking face. His eyes followed her gaze. When he saw Len, he laughed.

But the woman had already left him and was walking straight up to the spectral apparition. "Len!" she said.

It was only then that he recognised her. He fell in a heap.

When he recovered his consciousness, he was lying on a couch in a small office. Nobody was with him except the woman who had addressed him in the entrance to the hall.

"Are you better?" she asked.

She had taken off her coat and stood beside him in a tight-fitting dress of dark silk, her figure exactly as it had been years ago, in the log-house of the bush. Her face, though hardly changed in outline, was slightly plumper; but between chin and cheeks there were sharp lines. Her voice, though he recognised it at once, had a metallic ring which was new. Her motions as well as her speech proclaimed her strangely mature, as though she were centuries old, contemporary with the sphinx and the women of Babylon.

Silently his eyes roamed about; he did not answer.

With a movement of swift grace she bent over him. "Len," she said, "do you hear me, dear?" It was the tone of an empress.

He looked at her face and her bosom and nodded.

Tears dropped from her eyes on his breast. "You are terribly changed," she said.

He tried to sit up; she helped him; "Where are we?" he asked.

"In the office of the superintendent," she answered. "They carried you in here. Shall I send for a doctor?"

He shook his head; and she sat down by his side.

Again he looked her over with an absent eye. Something seemed to hold him by the throat.

With one of her white, soft hands she reached for one of his. "You were waiting for somebody?" she asked indefinably.

At last he spoke, his voice hard and matter-of-fact, almost weary. "I was waiting for you."

There was a catch in her voice, between a sob and a laugh, as she asked, "Did you see me go in?"

"No. I've been looking for you for many months. In the streets and in places like this." Were not these well-known facts?

She sank down before him, burying her face. His hand rested on her head, and slowly he began to stroke it. The hair was cut short at the level of her ear-lobes. Suddenly the room turned with him; and to steady himself, he gripped her shoulders. "I don't feel well," he said. "I must get home."

By main force she pulled herself together. "Where do you live?"

He named street and number of the house.

She rose and put on coat and hat and held his sheep-skin for him.

When she opened the door, they issued into the now dark corridor of the picture hall. There, a man was shrugging into his coat.

"Better?" he asked.

"Yes, thanks," Lydia replied and, taking Len's arm to support him, she led him down into the glaring street.

"Shall we take a car?"

"No," Len said, breathing deeply. "I am better. We'll walk."

In the course of half an hour they reached Len's lodgings. They had not spoken another word.

Arrived in the room where he had lived since he had first come to the city, he sat down on the bed. Fever was in him. He lay back; and Lydia drew the chair to his side. A few minutes later he was asleep. For awhile Lydia sat still and stiff.

Then she rose and lifted Len's feet to the bed, placing a pillow under his head. She had no sooner finished than there was a knock at the door.

Outside stood a big, towering woman in a faded kimono. She measured the girl confronting her with a look. The exaggeration of paint and powder and a subtle something proclaimed Lydia for what she was; but she did not lower her eyes. It was not effrontery which upheld her; it was courage. "Hm!" said the woman. "I thought so."

"He is ill," said Lydia. "He must not be disturbed."

"Then you may tell him whenever he wakes that I shall be needing his room tomorrow night."

Lydia was on the point of pleading; but, seeing the set lines in the woman's face, she refrained. "Very well." And she closed the door.

Before she sat down again, she removed Len's shoes and extinguished the light.

Twice, during the night, Len awoke. He was in a sweat but not delirious. Once he asked, "Are you there, Lydia?" The second time he merely reached out with a groping hand and touched her shoulder.

Startlingly, with the greying of dawn, the alarm clock rang.

At once Len swung his feet to the floor. For a moment he looked at the girl as though taken by surprise. Then he nodded and mechanically began preparations for going to work.

"Did you sit up all night?"

Lydia smiled a faint smile.

"Better rest now. I am going to work. We'll have breakfast together, though. Then you return to this room and wait."

"We can't stay here," she objected.

He was washing. "Oh?" was all he said.

"I'll find lodgings. A small furnished suite."

He nodded and went on with his preparations. Having washed, he made a bundle of his belongings.

Lydia had straightened her hair and removed her make-up.

They went out and down to Main Street. There, they entered a lunch room.

"Can you get your things?" he asked when they were seated.

She lowered her eyes. "No."

For a moment he stared at her with raised eyebrows. "Northcope Avenue?" he asked gently.

By way of answer, a scarlet blush flooded her face.

"This is pay-day," he said. "I've a little over ten dollars left. You take that. I've sixty-five dollars coming. Thirty-five I am sending home. You must arrange that we get along on the balance till the end of the month."

"Where do we meet? And when?" Lydia asked.

"Here. At half past twelve."

That was all.

Lydia wanted to ask a question; but Len waved it aside before it was uttered. He took all things for granted. Ten minutes later he left her to go to work.

At noon he found her waiting for him in the street. He felt very queer. His head was light, his limbs heavy.

Lydia greeted him with an almost animated smile. "I did not go in," she said, "I've found a place and prepared a meal at home."

"All right. I'm afraid I can't go back to work. It's on me again."

They returned to the very street where Len had had his lodgings. Wedged in between two tall warehouses stood a small store. Lydia took him into a lane and thence into a backyard piled with empty boxes; an outside stairway led to a small apartment

above the store. It consisted of two little attic rooms and a "kitchenette," scantily furnished.

Lydia had two fried pork chops ready. Len sat down and closed his eyes. "I cannot eat," he said. Whereupon Lydia assisted him to his bed and helped him to undress. He asked her to notify the company for which he worked.

Within an hour he was as delirious as he had been a year ago. Lydia grew frightened and finally, towards evening, went down into the store to ask for the address of a doctor.

The doctor came, sounded Len's chest, and looked grave. "You are his wife?"

"No," she said with the courage of desperation.

"Who are his people? And where do they live?"

"His stepfather farms between McDougall and Poplar Grove."

The doctor nodded. "You intend to look after him?"

"Yes."

"Best place for him is the hospital."

When Lydia looked up, there was a pitiful appeal in her eyes. She had only just found Len. "No. I'll nurse him. I am sure he would want me to."

"Very well. Absolute rest. No excitement. No solid food. Soups and egg-nogs. I'll write a prescription. A tablespoonful in water four times a day. Let me warn you, young lady. He will try to get out of bed. If you let him, he's lost. You should know what you're undertaking. He must be watched day and night. Lots of fresh air. Have the window

open at all times. Sure you are able to look after him?"

"Quite sure," Lydia replied, though she quaked inwardly.

The doctor nodded, appraising her. He wrote his prescription. Seeing her handle her small roll of bills, he said, "That will be two dollars. I'll be in again tomorrow morning. Good night."

Len lay quiet; and Lydia left him to ask the storekeeper to send someone to the drugstore. She bought a few tins of soup and returned upstairs. Again she prepared to sit up through the night.

The medicine came; and she wakened Len. He took his draught obediently and without comment. The air entering through the open window was cold; so, fetching some bedding from the other room, she wrapped up in a blanket and, without undressing, lay down on the floor.

It was not till morning that she had a sample of what she would have to go through before long. Len tried to get up. In a second she was on her feet, begging and coaxing and holding his covers down. Then she fought and wrestled, throwing her weight upon him till, exhausted, he gave in. It had taken all her strength. The same thing was repeated a few hours later.

When the doctor came, his first question was, "Did he try to get up?"

"Twice," she said grimly.

"Did he succeed?"

"No."

"Well, you have courage and a sense of duty. I'll

leave some pills. An hour after the first one, give him a sponge bath. You know how?"

"No."

He explained. "Listen here," he added. "You have an idea now what you are up against. This may last four weeks. It's going to tell on your strength. Whenever he's quiet, day or night, you rest, do you hear? Better move that other bed into this room. And take your meals regularly. If *you* slip a notch, *he*'ll suffer for it. I see how it is; or I'd insist on the hospital. But if you do your duty, by yourself as well as by him, he is better off here."

A week went by; the attempts at violence ceased. To that extent Lydia's worries were lessened. But the little store of money had dwindled to a last five-dollar bill and some small change. The manifestations of the delirium in which Len hovered became mental. His bed had been moved to a point whence he could look out through the window, at the blank wall of the neighbouring warehouse.

One morning he began to talk. At first he rattled off words and sentences which she did not understand. "Amo, amas, amat." At a tremendous speed. Lydia, who had no night-wear, was up at once, half naked, and by his side. He paid no attention to her. Feverishly she dressed in the flimsy silks which she had worn when they met. The vocal phenomena frightened her.

An hour or so later he pointed with a half-raised head out of the window. "Go down there," he said, "and ask the two women what they want of me."

Her heart missed a beat. "There is nobody there," she said gently.

His voice came in a nagging tone. "Don't you see them? They've been watching me for the last two days. The old women in black shawls. Go down and ask them."

Despair invaded her. Was his mind going? "Len," she said, "there is nobody there, dear."

"Don't I have eyes in my head?" he asked angrily.

"Len!" She put her arms about him. "Lie down, dear! You mustn't forget that you are delirious."

"Delirious!" he thundered in a hollow voice. "Can't a person be sick without being out of his mind? I'll go myself."

"No, no," she cried. "I am going." And she ran out, pretending that she was going down. When she returned, he had sunk back, asleep.

She told the doctor about it, and he laughed. "Don't you know better than to contradict a delirious patient? Humour him. Pretend to do what he tells you to, every time."

A week later, all strength seemed to leave Len. Lydia was alarmed anew. In anxiety she waited for the visit of the doctor. To her surprise he said, "We've saved him. His strength was unnatural. It was the fever in him eating up his vitality at a terrific rate. If all goes well, he'll be on his feet in three or four weeks. You can move your bed back to the other room. What he needs now is sleep and very nourishing food. Rare beef, beef-tea, raw eggs, and milk, milk. I won't call every day any longer. When

you need me, use the telephone. Otherwise I'll just drop in when I pass."

Great news! But where take nourishing food?

Shortly after, Len being very weak but perfectly clear in his mind, he asked, "Does the money still hold out?"

Lydia was very white; but she said lightly, "Oh, yes."

Henceforth she often sat with him hand in hand. Occasionally they spoke; but always about the small, indifferent things of the moment, above all of his desire to see the budding trees, the green grass, and the Lake, the Lake!

Both knew that there was something to clear up between them, something enormous. Both, by a mutual understanding, avoided to touch on it or even to approach it. When, by inadvertence, one of them mentioned anything that had occurred in the past, he instantly stopped with a wistful look and changed the subject.

They lived like brother and sister. Lydia never entered Len's room except fully dressed. In daytime she began to read to him from one or other of the dozen books which she had brought in his bundle from his former lodgings. Strange and incomprehensible books they seemed to her; George Eliot's Adam Bede, Macaulay's History of England, Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats. She would read a passage; and he would ask her to repeat it, many times, till she read it as he wanted it read.

One day Len asked what date it was. It was near

the middle of May. In sharp anguish quick thoughts shot through her mind. "It'll soon be May."

"You still have money?"

"Yes. I am very careful."

He looked at her as she moved about in the room, noticing that her dress was fringed at the bottom; there were tears in her waist, carefully mended. "You'll be needing clothes," he said.

She laughed; but it sounded artificial.

One day, with her assistance, he made an attempt to rise. He managed to sit up for half an hour. At night, the doctor dropped in.

"My friend," he said, "you are lucky. I doubt whether you'd have pulled through in a hospital. One thing no hospital can give."

Out of cavernous eyes Len looked a question.

"What that is?" the doctor asked and laughed. "It's love."

Lydia turned away.

A week later Len had his first few minutes' walk on Lydia's arm. When they returned to their rooms, Len sat musing. "The trees are far advanced for this time of year," he said at last.

"Yes," Lydia replied. "It has been an early spring."

Soon they were taking short street car rides to the parks. Tulips, crocuses, narcissi were in bloom. For Len, however, that was less striking than that, in a foot-path arched over by the young foliage of shrubs and trees he saw sweet colt's-foot and strawberry blossoms; and violets peeped out from under matted leaves. Lydia noticed his look and picked a

few, her face scarlet. She would not be able to keep up the fiction that his illness had been of short duration.

One day they walked down Main Street, to the office of the D. R. Company. The manager greeted Len pleasantly. "Well, sick again?"

Len nodded. "Yes," he said. His voice was changed to a deep bass. "Shall I find work with you once more?" On the counter stood a calendar from which a huge "26" stood out. "On May first?" he added.

"June, you mean," the manager corrected. "I guess so. You've always given satisfaction."

Len cast a slow look at Lydia. She stood scarlet.

"You got married, too?" the manager asked.

"Yes," Len said absently.

"Well, good luck to you. Report at the wood yard on June first."

Len nodded and turned to the door.

At night, when he had gone to bed, Lydia watched till she thought he was asleep. Then she slipped into her own room and made up for the street. She turned the light off and stood in the dark, listening. Hearing nothing, she groped forward. But her heart jumped into her throat; a hand had reached out of the blackness and was holding her wrist. The light flashed on, and Len stood before her. Without a word, he looked into her face; and when he left her, he turned the key in her door. Next morning, after a sleepless night full of despair, she rose from her bed and found the door unlocked. She went to prepare breakfast. Len

was fully dressed. A parcel lay on his bed. They ate in silence, avoiding each other's eyes.

At last Len spoke. "Take that parcel to 324 Grand Pre Avenue. That's a second-hand bookstore. Have you car-fare?"

She nodded.

"Take what you can get. Has the rent been paid?"

Again she nodded.

"On the way watch for a second-hand clothes-shop. There's my sheep-skin. I paid twenty dollars for it. We'll sell it. Meanwhile I'll write Charlie."

A day or two later Len and Lydia met the doctor. He spoke of a holiday. "Why not go to the farm for a month? But not to work. Just to loaf about. Lie in the sun on the grass."

Len was silent for a minute or so. "I'll do something of the sort, but not yet."

When they reached the park, Len saw a boat on the bank of the river. "The Lake!" he said. "I wonder whether I could handle a boat?"

They went down to the water's edge; and a small man followed them, clad in "sport" shirt and corduroy trousers.

"Hire a boat, sir?"

"How much?"

"Fifty cents an hour."

"All right."

The man brought the sculls. Len who had seen them handled helped Lydia to enter the boat and followed. The man, noticing that Len was awkward, gave directions. Soon Len managed to move

the boat after a fashion, and an hour's practice made him much less helpless.

"I'll do that every Sunday," he said when they landed. "I want to be expert before we take our holiday."

On the first of June he returned to work. On the third of the month, the sum of fifty dollars reached him, sent by Charlie who wrote that, if he had a crop, he would be free of debt in the fall.

There was no trouble about the work. Wood Len had handled at home.

He and Lydia went on living like brother and sister. At times, Len was strangely abstracted and given to musing. When their conversation approached dangerous topics, he turned it aside with a frown.

Every Sunday they went to the park where Len practised rowing. One day he asked the owner of the boat how much he would sell it for.

"I'll take twenty dollars. You want to buy her?"

"No. I was wondering, that is all."

"Good, sturdy little craft, you know."

"Would she stand the lake?"

"Why not? Cross small waves and hold alongside the big ones. Not, of course, a heavy sea."

"Have you ever been out on the lake?"

"Sure," the man said. "I've been fishing in the northern basin."

"How high do the waves run there?"

"Two, three feet in an ordinary wind. In a gale, of course. . . ."

"How high?" Len repeated.

"Ten, fifteen feet."

Len nodded.

The month went by. On the last day he asked for his cheque at the office and gave notice that he would not be back. When he came home, he sat for a long while, staring at Lydia. "We'll leave tomorrow," he said at last.

She paled. "Whereto?"

"The Lake. Not this one. Our Lake. I've had three wishes since I was I. One of them was to possess all knowledge. Another, to see the Lake. Within a week it will be fulfilled."

Lydia looked at him. He was in a state of exaltation, as though the fever were on him again. Her throat felt dry. She could not speak.

"The third wish," he added, "was to possess you."

Chapter II

THE LAKE

NEXT morning, after having cashed his cheque, Len made several purchases. The bundle which, about noon, he carried to the station held, besides his own few belongings, Lydia's things—including one of the two gingham dresses which she had bought—and a small, wedge-shaped tent. He had spent twenty dollars on his outfit. They boarded the train to Grand Pre and, having reached the small city, took a connecting branch line to the north till they arrived at what is called "The Landing" at the southern end of what for Len had always been The Lake. The Landing proved to be a small village, flanked on both sides by long lines of summer cottages of the well-to-do. A large shed by the waterside bore the legend, "Boats for Hire or Sale." Leaving Lydia, with the bundle, at the station, Len went down to that shed.

A red-headed Swede was willing enough to show his wares.

To the right, a sandy beach stretched round a bend in the shore. The lake itself was smooth as a mirror. To the left, an inlet narrowed into a wooded cove. Len looked about casually; but he felt far from casual; a dull excitement seethed in his blood.

He picked a fair-sized boat, a heavy craft with uncouth oars, but promising stability in the hands of an unpractised sailor. The price demanded, eighteen dollars, he paid without bargaining. Then he went to a store in the short street that led inland. He bought a stack of tinned provisions, two large, square tins of biscuits, two packages of matches, a tin kettle, and many other things of which they had made a careful list while travelling in the train. All which he carried down to the boat, depositing them in the bows.

At last he returned to the station, picked the bundle up, and nodded to Lydia. "Come."

It was between five and six o'clock when the red-headed Swede pushed their boat from the pier. Len dipped his oars, heading north-west.

The evening was the typical, quiet summer evening of the northern prairie. Through the day a sharp south wind had been blowing. Now it stood with folded wings of haze above the landscape, poised. The sun, in the west, was a crimson ball, heatless, rayless, scarcely distinguished in incandescence, though in colour, from the surrounding wall of glowing vapour. The forest which, from a slight ridge a few miles inland, swept right down to the water's edge, stood breathless in an intoxication of rest, after the feverish swaying and tossing of the day. Here and there, a swampy meadow stretched lazily through a hollow between the higher reaches of the bush.

As soon as, having rounded a small headland, they were out of sight of the town, Len frequently

rested his arms on the oars and looked about in a hushed sort of way, passive, as if he allowed himself to be soaked and penetrated in every pore by the enormity of the towering peace around. After the fever of the city this was rest. He had almost forgotten what an evening was. The stillness at once released all the inner springs of feeling and thought and crushed or smoothed over their outward manifestations.

Lydia lay in the back of the boat, reclining on bundles of baggage and holding the lines of the rudder. She, too, felt the influence of the landscape; but more than it she felt the reflection of it which came to her through the medium of Len. Her eyes were half closed as she watched him. She was acutely conscious of the fact that they were floating towards their destiny. Surrendering herself, she folded her hands.

An hour went by, two hours, three. For half an hour, perhaps, they had been out of sight of land. Then a huge, detached point hove into view in front, looking like an island.

The sun was nearing the horizon. Already, though the sun had not yet set, the light about them had the quality of dusk. Coolness breathed up from the water. Len rested more and more frequently. Once he consulted a pocket map.

"Let me try to row," Lydia said at last.

Without an answer Len half rose, leaning on the gunwales, to exchange places. She took his seat; and after half an hour which made her flushed and

excited, she managed to catch on, in a manner, to the mechanics of the thing.

Nearer and nearer they came to that forest headland which proved to be a mere promontory reaching out from the west.

The sun touched the horizon and dipped below it. Great, hollow, mysterious, night stood over the lake to the east.

Once more they exchanged places; and in the last light of day they touched the shore.

That shore resembled here a small cliff, of black soil, overhung by the huge canopy of an enormous, spreading, ash-leaved maple, a tent in itself. Len tied the boat to its roots.

A few minutes later he had a fire blazing in a small hollow behind the tree where the camp site was open to the sky. He dipped water from the lake and laid out the wherewithals of a supper for Lydia to prepare. He himself fell to work on the tent which he tied to a horizontal branch of the tree, right on the shore.

Lydia, as she went about, making tea and frying bacon, was a prey to conflicting feelings. So far they had been three: he, she, and the landscape. The landscape was obliterated by the night as the city had never been. Only he and she were left.

The light of the fire had built a smaller, narrower world into the immensity, shutting the shadows out. But there was a suggestion about the absence of actual walls as if that immensity lurked or hovered about, ready to spring and to seize her; ready also, should there be need, to come to her

help. She could not have told which was the more terrible, the relentless night over the waters or the silent, bearded man under the tree. She felt as if something were gripping her throat.

Every now and then, when she raised kettle or pan from the brush with which she fed the fire, she saw the sphere of their artificial microcosm enlarged by the light that flared up, picking out trees or grey, glistening stones a little farther away. Thus the fact was driven home again that this small world created by the light of the fire was surrounded by another huge world of unknown or at least unseen things. Fear drank at her heart; but fear, not of that unknown world beyond the line of light; it seemed strangely friendly as compared with that man who was working away in the shadows of the tree, preparing for the night. Why had he taken her here?

They ate in silence. Len cast curious glances about, out of his sunken, haggard eyes, which now made her heart leap with hope, now dropped it into unfathomed depths of despair.

When they finished, Len went down to the boat and pulled it up on the low cliff of the land till it tilted to a level position, its stern jutting out over the water. The fire died down.

Then they sat, wordless, at the edge of the shore; and now, since that world within the world was obliterated till there was nothing left of it but a few darkly glowing embers, heatless, rayless as the sun had been, the outer world reasserted itself in dimly seen outlines which seemed to become visible

only as a sound proceeded from them—perhaps from some small animal or from a bird prowling on his nightly errands. Apart from these alien sounds, the silence was enormous as the night.

Len and Lydia each had his own thoughts; heart-wringing thoughts perhaps; for there seemed to be no bridge from one to the other. Each felt that, had the other spoken, he would have thrown himself at that other's feet; a conflagration of passion would have created a third world full of rays unseen but perceived by what lay beyond the realm of the senses. Yet this feeling was vague; so much so that it could only be marvelled at in awe, longed for in despair, not expressed by even so much as a sigh. They seemed to be sitting on the shores of the sea of life and looking out over its dimly gleaming waters. Their essence was incorporeal, ghostly, gigantic in outline, hardly divined. Undisguised by clothes or flesh, their souls faced each other and feared the contact. For between them stood something which was enormous as the night.

Again hours went by. In front of them, far to the east, the ghost of a pale irradiation defined itself over the sleeping waters. Almost simultaneously the leaping of a fish startled them, a big, heavy fish that fell back with a splash.

After a moment Lydia laughed a low, hushed laugh, raising a hand to her throat. That laugh recalled them to the knowledge that they were still in the flesh, not yet disembodied.

Lydia gripped Len's arm. "Look!"

He was leaning against the elbow of a root, in

front of her; she was sitting erect, behind and above him.

The irradiation above the waters defined itself; a huge, red, swollen half-moon had risen and became visible through the pall of haze. They looked and looked; and as it rose—"it", for it was sexless now—it contracted till it hung above the lake, an ordinary half-moon in its waning phase. All about, a pale world became visible. The night was so exceedingly calm that they saw the reflection of the moon in the lake sharply defined, as it is rarely seen in a lake though often in a deep pool in the hills: there was no lane of light leading to their feet as in rippled water.

This seemed to break the enchantment instead of enhancing it. Len rose with a sigh; and Lydia followed him to the tent. He had not kissed her since they had met again. She could have thrown herself at his feet, clasping his knees in agony or supplication. He looked tall and broad, solemn and unapproachable in the night as he lifted the tent flap and tied it back. He struck a match on the sole of his boot to show her the arrangement he had made.

The tent was divided into two compartments, by a piece of canvas stretched lengthwise through its centre.

"You'll find your bundle at the far end," he said, pointing. Then, bending, he entered his side. "Good night," he said, not harshly; but with a friendliness which was hard to bear.

She bent down and crawled in. The bed for which Len had gathered dry sedges from the drift

fringe on the open shore south of the sheltering tree was not uncomfortable; the welfare of her body was provided for! She lay and listened. He was undressing for the night. He rolled up in his blanket and sank back with a sigh of satisfaction. Very soon, his breathing showed him to be asleep.

Lydia lay awake, dozed, awoke again, listened, looked, feared, and quieted herself. For an hour or longer she cried into the crook of her arm. Again there was a world within the world: the tent, dimly luminous with the increasing light of the moon. That little world was the heart of the great world outside, throbbing with the beat of that heart of hers, a cave of misery. Death would have been mercy.

Again she wept, soundlessly, conscious of nothing outside; conscious only of the pulse in her veins. At last exhaustion did its work; she became aware of physical discomforts. Removing shoes and stockings, she loosened her clothes and fell asleep.

A huge, soughing moan running through the world awakened her. Sharp, crackling sounds seemed to play a tune to that accompaniment. Then, through the moan, a muffled roar reached her ear; and, within that roar, rhythmical also, but in shorter, almost breathless intervals, a lapping sound, strangely angry. The tent, this world within the world, was hot and brightly illumined by a sun in which the shadows of branches and leaves danced and leapt. The tent itself was dancing and moving. It felt as though the solid earth had come to life. Frightened, she sat up and called. No

answer. She called again; and again no answer. She lay down to lift the partition: Len was gone.

In a second she was outside, barefooted, clad only in her gingham dress. Thus she emerged from the second tent of the whipping tree branches which swept low, lashed by a furious south wind.

She understood. The moan came from the forest; the roar, from the lake. They were on the point of the headland. On its south-east shore, breakers were rolling in; along its north-east edge, in the lee, short, lapping waves were hitting the little cliff with angry slaps. The wind flattened her dress against her body; behind her, its hem crackled like the flap of the tent. The huge maple stood huddled and humped under the wind, bending its shoulders into a round dome. The hollow where the fire had been was flooded; the boat was gone.

She ran out to the point where they had been sitting last night; her short hair blew open in the wind. And then she saw Len.

Fully dressed, he stood up to his breast in water, struggling with the boat which had filled, trying to work it around into the lee of the land. The sight of the lake, seething with white-caps, frightened her. Len could not swim. But he had seen her and turned. His beard lay flattened against his chin. He tried to shout; but a wave caught full against his body, nearly throwing him over and splashing the water high over his head. At that he laughed. How young he looked.

She ran to the north edge of the point. They were on an island now; for the breakers swept right

across the hollow in the bush. She entered the water which was shallow, sloping slowly, the bottom consisting of gravelly sand. A minute later she reached the boat; and jointly they secured it on the lee shore, both laughing. She was wet to her waist; he, to his shoulders. Head and hair were splashed with water.

A new sense of happiness came over her: they had worked together!

"I saw cows and a house over there," Len said. "I'll bail the boat. Go and see whether we can get milk. The water is too muddy for tea."

"Will the people be up?"

He looked at the sun. "It is close to seven."

She thought of a wrist-watch which had remained behind in the city because she had not happened to wear it on the night when they had met. She turned to the tent to get her shoes.

"My coat's lying on the floor," Len called after her. "You'll find money in the left side pocket." Having tied the boat, he came for a pail and saw her drying her feet. "Better try to get used to going barefooted," he said. He was barefooted himself and had rolled his trousers up to his knees. Both laughed at her flapping, clinging skirt as she rose to her feet.

An hour later, after breakfast, Lydia asked, "Are we going to stay till the wind dies down?"

"No. We'll sail to that point over there."

"Sail?"

"Are you afraid?"

She hesitated. The question seemed to have a

deeper meaning. Then, lowering her eyes under his look, "Not while we are together."

They packed up. Len inserted one of the oars in the mast-socket of the boat, in the forward thwart, and tied the sheet of canvas to it, securing its corners by two short ropes. For himself he prepared a seat in the stern where he fastened the tiller over the rudder. Forward, he spread the tent on the floor, with their bundles for pillows. Sun and wind had dried their clothes.

"The water has taken the starch out of that gingham," Lydia said, looking down at herself.

"It looks more natural now," Len replied. He consulted his map. "The lake is twenty-five miles wide here," he said.

After a few vain attempts at controlling the speed of the boat, they scudded along before the wind, tossing wildly over the waves of the bay which grew higher the farther they left their camp site behind. The spray flew aloft and ahead of them as it was caught up in the wind. Through the upper reaches of the atmosphere vapour sheets hurried north; and the light of the sun grew less and less defined. The wind was hot like the breath of a desert.

On and on they went; their only salvation being in keeping straight before the wind. Once or twice the animal instinct of self-preservation drove Lydia into a protest. Len laughed. "Get used to the presence of death," he said. "This wind means death to thousands of creatures. I saw, this morning, fish stranded on the shore, and crows waiting to devour them. I saw the holes of rats and gophers filled. We

are no more life than they, little as we may think of them in our ignorance."

At noon, Len tried to land. But he was no sailor. He knew from books that it was possible to run into the wind; but how it was done, he could not tell. He made the attempt on the weather shore of a point, but he soon found himself in the margin of the surf; once they entered among the breakers, they would be swamped; if they capsized, they would certainly lose their provisions and might lose their boat. How he managed, he could not have explained. But he succeeded in turning the craft till they ran parallel to the combers, dipping and rolling as the waves heaved and subsided under their keel. They shipped water and laughed. Lydia now sat down and bailed.

Again they were in the open bay, the white-caps swirling and eddying under them. His unsuccessful attempt at landing had taught Len to steer clear of headlands. In the middle of the afternoon, when they were munching some biscuits, they saw, on a beach-crest to the west, among stunted poplars and willows, the village of an Indian Reserve.

"We go past," Lydia said.

"Past everything," Len nodded. "This tub is in the hands of a thing mightier than we. I may have to sail all night since I don't know how to land."

"The wind will die down, won't it?"

"Not tonight."

Lydia felt strangely. Len was committed to the wind; and she to him. How did he know that the wind would not die down? She had never valued

the lore of the wild. But when she spoke, she used a word he had used, pronouncing it with a shame-faced laugh. "Will this tub hold together?"

"Unless we strike rocks."

She felt very near to him. This word which she had never before heard applied to a boat was a bond between them; it stamped them as belonging together, marked off from the world. Consciously she picked up other words; and during the days that followed, the two acquired a language known only to them. Before night a second term had been added to this rudimentary vocabulary. "The bunk seems solid as compared with this, doesn't it?"

"The bunk?" Their bed in the tent, of course. She smiled. "The bunk is wet," she said, with the same shame-faced laugh.

At five or six o'clock they were as by a miracle enabled to land. There was an island ahead. Breakers thundered to their right as well as to their left. A sand-bank in the open lake intercepted the waves rolling in. "That must be a reef," Len said. "If we had hit it, we might have been drowned." A shiver ran down Lydia's spine.

They were sailing into the strait between main shore and island. Len had noticed that Lydia had changed colour. "The dead population of the earth is greater than the living one," he said.

She looked at him; his eyes were ahead. "I suppose so," she murmured.

Within a few seconds, their sail began to flap; they had run into the lee of the island and were in a "slick". Len sounded the depth with his oar. To

their common surprise they were in no more than two feet of water. Instead of using the oar for poling, Len sprang overboard and pushed the boat, wading. He rounded the headland. "Better get into shelter," he said, bending over the stern. "There will be a storm tomorrow."

"How do you know?" Her face was very close to his.

"I've lived in the bush."

"So have I."

"No," he said. "There are two of you. One has so far only lived in my imagination; the other has lived in a mistaken dream of the world."

A dream of the world! How far all that seemed!

"This sort of thing takes the starch out," he said.

"The starch?"

"The vanity and pretence of the world: the starch from your dress. It is just as serviceable without it." And he nodded to the crumpled, shrunk gingham about her bare legs.

Shortly after, they landed at a diminutive sand beach between two copses of willow. Behind them, a thicket of willow and, outtopping it, balsam poplar formed an impenetrable wall shutting the beach off from the rest of the world.

Partly because it was earlier in the day than it had been last night, partly because there was a new thing between them, they did all the work in common this time. The shelter in which they were was perfect. Behind them, willows and poplars were pressed into rounded domes by the wind; those to both sides of their beach stood perfectly still. The

very smallness of this refuge on the north or lee shore of the headland—it was no more than twenty feet from west to east—again made of it a world within the world. Overhead, the wind careered; behind them, the moan of the willows seemed stationary. Theirs was a haven of rest.

They unloaded the boat and drew it up on the sand, inverting it and propping its landward edge up with short pieces of drift. Under this improvised roof they stored their provisions. Their tent they pitched in the edge of the bush screen behind.

Together they built a fire of drift wood, fried bacon, made tea. The water for the latter they dipped from the lake, allowing it to stand till the mud had settled. Both were barefooted, bareheaded; Len had his trousers rolled up.

For an hour after supper they were busy about their camp. In the last light of the palely setting sun, Len had a dip in the lake, telling Lydia that he was going to strip. She, respecting the implied wish for privacy, strolled west along the shore. A few hundred feet farther on, she found a second beach, exactly like the first. So she, too, stripped and entered the water; between them, the willow copse ran out into the lake. As by a common impulse they invaded deeper water till they could see each other dimly; and each called the other's name, laughing and splashing. When they met again, they were dressed as before. Yet there was the consciousness of a new nearness.

The sun had set; and suddenly, with the effect of magic, the whole vapour masses of the sky were suf-

fused with a lurid, angry purple. When it paled, the clouds remained a uniform tint of grey. . . .

As the night before, they looked for a place to sit down. But, as if he made it a point, Len inverted their relative position. Lydia reclined in front; he sat erect behind her. For awhile they talked. Lydia felt an almost childish need to use again those words —"tub," "bunk," "starch"—with their new meanings. Then they lapsed into silence, listening to the moan of the wind in the thicket behind, and to the distant, rhythmical roar of the breakers; they tasted fully this bleakness of the night.

Lydia shivered. She bent back as though to find Len's eye. But that very moment she felt the touch of his hand on her shoulder. "In two or three days," he said, "we shall be near Poplar Grove. From there I am going to go home. I shall leave you alone for a day or two. When I get back, it will be between you and me."

Lydia sat very still. It sounded like a promise; and yet it sounded also like a threat. She reached for his hand and touched it. But in less than a second their fingers fell apart again.

Len was thinking. Always, even during his recent convalescence, she had disturbed his senses; she had done so yesterday in the boat; and later on the beach. She did so no longer. Since they had met, he had never been able to forget that he was a man, she a woman. Even his beard had added to this realisation of his manhood.

She was a woman. But that meant, not so much

something different from himself, as something essentially rather the same. Sex was an important factor of character; but it was subordinated to greater facts.

From this recognition arose a new line of thought. He had taken her into the wilderness to have her inescapably to himself. He had wanted to possess and to kill her; and perhaps to kill himself after that. This plan of his seemed inadequate now. His mind struck out along new paths. Where they would lead him, did not yet appear. Meanwhile he saw in her an equal who must be consulted about the course to be taken. He tried to make clear to himself what kind of a change had come over her during the day. The mincing step, considered so feminine by those who lived in towns or cities, had disappeared. She stepped along in big, frank strides. Her movements were no longer calculated to fascinate or allure; they were sincere. She had dropped all the pretences of sex. He searched in his memory for that which might have brought about such a change. He found nothing. It had come like a miracle: the miracle of spring which comes in a night of the month of May.

As if to banish thought, he suddenly spoke once more of their future. "I hope," he said, "we shall have nice weather in a day or two. Then we shall proceed. Twenty-four miles north of Poplar Grove there is another village. Beyond that, the narrows and absolute wilderness." He paused and hesitated. Then, with something welling up within him from

his depths and communicating itself to her, so that she hung breathless on his words. "The account which we two have to settle concerns us alone. We must have that wilderness to do it in."

Chapter III

LEN'S PROBLEM

THREE days later they landed in a sort of cove situated in a shallow bay behind a huge, beach-like sand-bank running, from a point a mile or so north, like a spit into the lake. Len secured the tent, pulled the boat out of the water, inverted it, and arranged all things in such a way that Lydia would be safe even if a storm should blow up. Huge, primeval trees sheltered the spot from all sides except due east; and there, beyond the sand spit, the lake stretched away to the very horizon. In the morning, when Lydia awoke, he was gone.

With a pang she realised how desperately lonely the day would be. Nothing to do but to wait. Perhaps Len would be back by night; perhaps not. She knew her doom was overtaking her. There was still time to evade it. Len had given her this opportunity to escape; he had left the remainder of his money with her; enough to take her to the city. The town, three miles inland, was the end of steel. She thought it strange that she was not even tempted to take the hint.

The wilderness! There was no one to give help or to interfere. What would Len do to her? He would kill her. She cried a little when she thought of it. Life seemed sweet since she had felt his hand

on her shoulder. But she could not leave; could not think of it. Death? Rather death than what she had lived through in the city! Nothing is as inhuman as humanity in the mass; humanity as embodied in its institutions. Why had she thrown in her lot with Len? Because she had had two years' time to regret and repent. She would follow him to the end of the world even though he might be demented. They had met again; they would not part again. The finger of God was discernible in their meeting. Yet, between them stood those two years!——

Meanwhile Len, clad in shirt, overalls, and boots, had reached the Big Ridge and entered Poplar Grove from the north. In one of his pockets he carried a few biscuits. He was swinging along in big strides, never stopping in town, and turned west along the correction line which led to Mr. Crawford's cottage.

A mile or so from town, a farmer overtook him, driving a wagon. Len was offered a ride and accepted. Remarks were exchanged about the weather and the crops. The farmer, Kurtz by name, was known to Len; but Len remained unrecognised. Asked for his name, he gave it.

"Not living hereabouts?"

"No. I live along the lake."

"Going to McDougall?"

"No. I have business with a man by name of Crawford."

"The teacher?"

"Yes."

"Getting old," the farmer said. "A strange man, they tell me."

"Know a man by name of Kolm?"

"Kolm? From Macdonald? Sure."

"He's living in town, isn't he?"

"Part of the time," the ponderous farmer replied. "He has a homestead in the bush, next to where he used to live. He wants to go back there. He's built a shack. Starting all over."

"His wife with him?"

"Yes." Adding, "You can't make a townsman out of a farmer."

Len nodded. After that, apart from occasional remarks on one side or the other, they proceeded in silence. The landscape assumed the character of the muskeg bush, familiar to Len. It was still early in the morning when the farmer stopped his team at a culvert bridging the ditch north of the road. "I am home," he said.

"Thanks for the ride." And Len climbed over the wheel. Within another hour he was within sight of the Big Slough. Beyond, the little white cottage stood on the burnt-over ridge. Why had he come?

He was in perplexity; he wanted a direction from someone. But could anyone interfere between him and Lydia? This trip had been made in an impulse of cowardice! He had hoped to evade making the decision himself.

Yet he had also come because he owed it to the man who lived in that cottage not to depart without a word of farewell. That man had first planted hope in his life.

When he knocked at the screen door, a man much older than he whom he had known came to the door. He did not seem to recognise Len. His beard and hair were snow-white; neither had been cut for a long while. He stooped over his cane, both hands on its knob.

Then, in a feeble voice, "Oh, it is Len, is it?"

Was it only two years since Len had seen this man? Yet, he himself was perhaps more fundamentally changed than the teacher.

"Come in," the voice said.

Len entered and shook a fleshless hand, taking it in both of his.

They passed through the kitchen into the study where Mr. Crawford at once sank down on the couch. Len sat and looked.

"Yes, yes," the old man nodded. "It's I, Len. The days of our years are three-score and ten. I always knew I should go quickly once I stopped work. I still play with that." Waving his hand at the desk where papers were scattered, with water-colour sketches of butterflies.

As he sat and looked, Len knew that he could not even ask for advice; already he understood that he could not accept whatever counsel might be offered. The best he might have hoped for was to have cleared his own thoughts by trying to explain them to another.

"Well," the old man said, "how are things with you, Len? I have sometimes hoped you would write one day. You said in your last letter you were going to try."

"Yes. I thought so at the time. I have twice been ill since then and have given up. But I came to thank you once more for all you have done for me." His voice shook.

The old man gave an appallingly senile nod and lay back. "Reading and writing," he said, "are one way to beguile one's time. I haven't the leisure any longer. I have my accounts to settle with God. That is the final thing you come to at last. There's a new craze abroad, I hear. Radio! Telephone, telegraph, railways, airplanes, gramophones, cinema, radio—all of a kind. Pretty toys. To create them we have made half the world of men into slaves—slaves that till the field and slaves that fire the engines to turn the wheels. There's only one state of society in which you can do without slaves: where all men are free because they live in voluntary poverty and simplicity. And that you find in the wilderness only."

"The wilderness," Len said in order to break the silence that fell. "That is where I am going."

The old man re-opened his eyes which had fallen shut, looking at Len as if he did not understand how he came to be there. Len felt that he was nothing any longer to this man: his was the problem of death, not of life: he had turned to the wall and faced another world. Let them who have the strength wrestle with the inconsequential details of the day! For awhile Len sat in silence. Then he became aware that his old teacher was asleep. He rose and tiptoed to the door. The old man's eyes

were on him, wide open; his lips seemed to mutter words. But the eyes closed again; and Len went out.

On the road, he hesitated once more; and suddenly he saw, coming along the trail in the margin of the Big Slough, a buggy with a woman in the seat. That trail he had gone innumerable times as a boy and a youth; he would never go it again! The feeling of the irrevocable flight of time overwhelmed him.

The buggy was old and rickety, its wheels wobbling on the cones of their axles. A moment later he was hailed. The woman was Helen.

She drew in by his side. "Coming home with me, Len?"

He shook his head. "I can't." His eyes swept over her; she was with child.

Her face coloured under his look. "Charlie will scold if I tell him I saw you and did not bring you along."

"You must tell him I cannot come. I have work that demands that I be calm and undisturbed. The farm is his. That is what I have worked for during the last three years: to save the farm for him and you. Don't ask any questions. Between you and Charlie all is well?"

"Of course. But. . . ."

"No," Len repeated with a painful look in his eye. "Tell him also that within a few days all will be well between Lydia and me. I shall never come home again."

Her eyes were wide with horror. "Len, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know myself yet," he answered. "But I am as nearly content as I can be after what has happened. Where are you going?"

"To bring Mr. Crawford his dinner. He cannot look after himself any longer. We have offered to take him into the house. He won't have it. So I go every day for an hour and do his work."

"Mother's with Kolm?"

"Yes. They are poorer than ever. But she works with him. They are clearing land. Charlie loans him the tools he needs. He is going to break for him next spring. Kolm will pay for the breaking with work."

"The debt?"

"Will be cleared off this fall. Len, you must come."

"Don't tempt me. Lydia is waiting."

"In the city?"

"Don't ask. No. At the lake shore." And extending his hand, he added, "Good-by, Helen. I was worried about that man in the cottage. I came because I had not seen him for two years."

The young woman looked at him, wondering what was behind it all.

"Good-by," he repeated; and this time she took his hand. He held it, drew her forward, and kissed her forehead. Then he strode away to the east, along the grade.

He was wincing with sobs. The anguish of parting had not been spared him as he had hoped; and the bitterness of all leave-takings, all final things closed about his heart like the grip of a hand.

He was profoundly disturbed by this encounter.

He had thought he had found his way through the labyrinth and seen a door that led beyond. Life called again. Regrets of what might have been swayed his soul. Might it still be, perhaps? A place in the bush—he and she? Tears ran down his cheeks and were caught in his beard before they fell. He thought of the new Lydia whom he had seen, resurrected and unlike her who had stirred impure blood; unlike also the deified, ethereal being of his fancy years ago. She was earthly, flesh and blood; yet purified by he knew not what. He knew not what? By love.

Could they still be the perfect whole, he and she?

Yes, he said to himself; and the warmth of life flowed once more through veins chilled by death.

On and on he went, mile after mile, without seeing road or bush, without seeing the farms he passed, lonely, self-contained places, worlds within the world, like that of his dream; without seeing the sunlight even which began to slant from behind; without seeing the birds and the animals of the forest about him. Far away to the east, in the evening light, the Ridge appeared, a rise in the ground, with larches and spruces outtopping the poplar forest. And suddenly he stood as though struck by lightning.

A thought had flashed through his brain and lamed him like a hemorrhage. No. Life was not for him. That thought decided all things. His road lay clear ahead and led into death. But this side of

death, this side of the mysterious portal, there lay fulfilment.

Again sobs welled up in him like a flood. His whole frame shook under the impact of a certainty which hit him like a physical blow.

It was certainty, doing away with all doubt. Terrible as the thought had been, it had done what all musings had been unable to do. It had removed the last hesitation; it had removed the last regret.

When, late at night, he reached the lake shore and found boat and tent where he had left them, he stopped and listened.

Lydia's voice came from the tent. "Are you back, Len?"

"Yes," he said. His heart had missed a beat. She had not fled!

"And all is well?"

"All is well," he replied.

Chapter IV

THE NARROWS

FOUR days later they came, still going north, to a point where they saw land on both sides.

Both the great lakes have such a constriction called The Narrows, where a limestone ridge—the same in both, running roughly east to west—sends its rock-ribs, strewn with granite, into the depression filled by the waters. In the case of the western lake the west shore is fully wooded, the forest alternating only with swampy meadows where soil and water are caught and held in huge pockets of the underlying rock. On the east shore, bare ledges crop out in monotonous succession, forming bold formations of low, hilly promontories and capes. Beyond, both lakes widen out again. At the northern end of The Narrows, the real wilderness begins, inhabited only by Indian, half-breed trapper, and fisherman, living in dispersion.

There, then, Lydia expected her fate to be decided. Meanwhile, nothing seemed to be changed in her relationship to Len; yet, everything was changed.

Perhaps the bond between them had merely been drawn a little closer. In an analysis of its component parts, it consisted of very small things indeed: of a look of understanding, a touch of the fingers, a

word from that ever growing language of theirs to which they had given a meaning unknown to others. There were no others any longer; they had passed the last village; in fact, there had been no others since they had taken to the lake. They might have used any language whatever; for they did not use words for the purpose of concealing their meaning. Yet, this language seemed to group them apart within the community of mankind, to which after all they belonged. Besides, these words took on a completeness of meaning, a fulness of significance which, in ordinary language, would have demanded many words and circumlocutions. They smiled whenever they used one of these terms.

Lydia had become more expert at handling the boat than Len. She never "crabbed" her oars any longer; with the improvised sail, she managed to go almost at right angles to the wind. As soon as her initial lack of familiarity had worn off, she seemed naturally to take to the water as Len took to horses and other animals.

For two or three days, with varying winds, they sailed up through the narrowing channel, with the land in view east and west. Bold headlands projected into the water; deep, wide bays opened up between them. The wind had blown prevailingly from the north-west, piling the waters into the southern basin. But just at the time when they encountered the first rocky islands and reefs in the throat of the Narrows, it sprang around to the south again. The consequence was that, as soon as they entered the

strait, they were caught in a current which swept them north, irresistibly, like doom.

They lingered. Tacitly both Len and Lydia seemed to agree on procrastination. Daily they went on; but they travelled no more than two or three hours; till, in fact, they saw some delightful spot which seemed to invite them.

The landscape changed. Evergreen trees prevailed: larches, pines, spruces, and the small balsam fir. The floor of the woods was white with the four-lobed dogwood bunchberry unknown in their native bush. Strawberries and raspberries abounded in profusion.

During the last few nights Len seemed to be given to quotation. Mostly he quoted Shelley; though Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Coleridge came in for their share. When he began to recite, he watched Lydia for signs of her response; and when he discovered in her eye the glimmer of inebriety engendered by the rhythm, he launched his voice and chanted whole poems into the rising dark. Their favourite was Shelley's "Ode to Night." Somehow both understood that this tendency of Len's sprang from the desire to make her understand his old aspirations; she did understand. With tears running down her cheeks she sat and listened, in a vain regret that these aspirations were a thing of the past.

Their direct intercourse remained unimpassioned, cool, almost humorous. Words of deeper import seemed to be forbidden.

On the night of the third day in the straits they camped just south of its narrowest, northernmost

gorge which was more properly called The Narrows. That night, the south wind which, during the last few days, had at no time been strong died down completely; simultaneously, the sky clouded over into a uniform vault of grey. When they attended to what had now become the routine of pitching camp, there was a touch of wistfulness and sadness about them; as of a foreboding that they were shortly going to be driven out from the garden of Eden.

Next morning, they awoke into a cold, grey dawn. A chill east wind was blowing, not very strong, but such as to make them shiver: a wind which seemed to presage ill fortune and the anguish of loneliness and desolate care. Without words they broke camp and embarked.

Soon the current, still running from the south, swept them through the last portal, no more than a mile in width, and out into the wider reaches of the northern basin. To the west lay open water, rough with waves which rolled before the wind. To the east, the projecting rock-ribs formed two more headlands which ran out to the north-west like two twin capes. The first and nearer one was wooded down to the water; the second, far one was bare. Len was rowing; Lydia, handling the rudder.

As the lake widened out, Len rested his oars and scanned the horizon ahead. The same thought awoke in both: to run to the east shore and to land in some cove on the wooded promontory; there to wait till the weather turned golden again: to linger in Eden. But to land on the east shore was in itself

a new departure and equivalent to leaving Eden behind. Always, so far, they had camped on the west shore. Len hesitated about the decision.

Lydia made a motion as if to change places. He nodded.

When the change was made, she rowed ahead, turning the bows to the east. Len who held the tiller might have reversed the direction; but he used the rudder only to keep the boat to a straight course.

With hardly a stop for breathing Lydia rowed on. Meanwhile the wind began to shift, springing into more northerly quarters and sending a cold spray over the bows.

On and on they went; and within two or three hours they were in the bay between the two eastern headlands, nearing the point of the far one. It seemed to be a white cliff of limestone, with not a tree or shrub to clothe its nakedness.

When they reached the point, Len steered the boat into a berth behind a small rib of rock. The water was deep; no shelving beach stopped the boat; it floated free even when it touched the very flank of the rock. He put his hand on that flank and nodded to Lydia who had shipped her oars. She rose, climbed forward over the thwarts, reached for the rope, and sprang ashore. When Len followed her, she looked up. "Bunk?" The smile with which the word was spoken was pitiful.

He shook his head. "We'll run over there," nodding his head towards the second, wooded headland which they had passed. He secured the boat. The

little craft was as safe as a liner in the slip of her dock.

They turned and went to the very point of the cape.

The landscape had the grandeur of death. Widely-flung ledges of limestone formed a giant's stairway of terraces, low cliff looming above cliff as if indicating successive shorelines of the lake. Each of these cliffs showed, on the outside, its original stratification, erosion having eaten out the softer parts; and each was composed of so many shelves. Dark-brown lichen glued to the smoother surfaces formed the only trace of vegetation on this storm and wave-battered promontory.

But the most curious feature consisted in the topmost layer of each of these terraces which ascended like so many steps to a height of perhaps a hundred feet above the lake. In each and every case, this top layer was broken up into circular, plate-like fragments, a foot or a foot and a half in diameter, resembling the half of a cymbal. Like the half of a cymbal, each fragment was concave above and convex below—an effect of the tilting action of strong wind and the dissolving power of rain gathered in its centre. As the veering wind sprang to the northwest, these plates of rock began to move, first desultorily, then in unison, in a tilting, rolling motion, their edges striking the smooth and hard surface of the layer below with a sharp, rapping sound which trailed off into a grinding noise as the contact ran around the circumference. The effect was uncanny

and weird. Lydia shivered as she heard it for the first time.

More and more, as they stood and looked, the wind veered around, settling at last into a steady, moaning blow of no great force. But it was sufficient to keep the plates moving and revolving all over the headland.

Len sat down, looking about him with hollow and cavernous eyes. The thought of death was on him; death was proclaimed by the very tongues of the rock. Lydia stood, feeling cast-away and desolate.

At last she took courage and spoke. "Let us go, Len."

He shook his head. "I want to taste this to the dregs. Sit down."

She obeyed. But if she had not yet known what was coming, if the whole situation had not pointed to the inevitable issue of it all, this whim of Len's would have told her. Of late, she had mostly sat in front of him; he had liked to touch her hair or her shoulder with his hand. She sat behind him now: they were worlds apart.

Thus, under a grey and dismal sky, they listened to that eery music of the rock which sounded like the chattering of teeth, but of teeth set in a death's-head without flesh or skin: it was like the insane laughter of the grim reaper himself.

At last Len rose, a light in his eyes. He looked at Lydia and, seeing that the tears trembled under her lashes without falling, he reached for her arm; for the first time since they had met again, he drew her

to him and kissed her brow. She shivered under that kiss.

They returned to the boat and re-embarked, Len taking the oars. He pushed off into the bay and turned, heading across to the southern peninsula. The wind was not yet strong enough to raise a surf. They went close inshore and scanned various little inlets with regard to their suitability for a camping site.

Several times Lydia said, "This is all right"; but Len shook his head. "We want something we'll be satisfied with for some time."

It was late in the afternoon when they found what he wanted; a small beach between thickets of pine raised aloft on bold granite domes. The shelter was perfect. In one place, the granite dyke which formed the western wall leaned over at the apex of the beach, in such a way as to make it possible, in case of rain, to dispense with the tent. As if the rocks held the heat, it was warmer in this inlet than out on the lake.

They beached the boat and inverted it, taking care to do so where it would be in the shade should the sun come out.

Several times, while they worked, Lydia straightened and stood as if listening: she was trying to determine the bitter-sweet flavour of these hours. They could be lived but once; she wanted to fix their memory for eternity.

Once or twice the sound of the rock cymbals on the northern cape reached her ear; and she shivered. Then she felt as though she had given herself into

the power of a maniac; as if all this which she had mutely agreed to were sheer insanity. But when she looked at Len, she knew that she must follow where he led; yes, that they must go together, neither of them leading or lagging behind.

The work done, they strolled about as was their custom.

Again, as he had done on the headland of the laughter of death, he leaned on her arm. They explored the bush, exclaimed at lichens, mosses, and flowering plants which they found. They even exaggerated their interest in them to disguise the fact that they knew the last stage of their relationship to be opening up.

Then night closed in, not as a new presence, but as a mere intensification and thickening, as it were, of the quality of the day that had gone. They returned to camp and kindled a fire.

Both were conscious of the fact that, whenever that fire died down, the last act of the tragedy of their lives would begin. So, with unusual noise and laughter even, they built a huge pyre which, for awhile, illumined the whole hollow of the beach. To the north, the water was restless and vocal. A waxing moon made the vapour tent of the sky half luminous over their heads.

But when both became aware of the artificiality of their merriment, they sat back and watched the fire consuming itself till there was nothing left but the darkly glowing embers from which a whiff of wind penetrating their retreat now and then peeled off a silky film of whitish ash. Even that dark-red

glow blackened at last; and still they were sitting, leaning against some rocks which were scattered over the beach and which the irradiation from the fire had warmed.

The darkness in the hollow was complete. Overhead, the wind moaned through the pines.

Lydia's heart missed a beat when, sharp and harsh, Len's voice pierced the night.

Chapter V

THE RECKONING

If you had been," Len said, "what I thought you could be for me, Lydia, you would have doubled and trebled my manhood."

The silence which followed was breathless with anguish.

"I have thought and thought till I was almost numb with the effort. Now I must act."

Another silence.

Len stirred. "I am afraid I am going to crush you," he said.

Lydia had drawn her knees to her chin, her arms clasped about them. A smile played on her lips; could it have been seen, it would have looked insane.

Len's presence seemed to dissolve into no more than a voice sounding through the night. "Here we are in the wilderness, you and I. When I was a child, not so long ago, I realised one day that I was incomplete; that to have full life, I must find my other half. I thought I had found it in you. I still think so. That is why I am here. But there are two years of which I know nothing. And I must know."

Again there was a long silence. Then, with a catch in her voice, Lydia spoke. "I was in a . . . house."

Hours seemed to pass in the compass of minutes.

"Were you . . . innocent when you entered that house?"

"Mr. Smith . . ." she said as if out of burning fires.

"Dick Jackson?" Len asked.

"No. I went with him. I tried to pay the price. I could not. I fled from him in the city." All this as though in half angry protest.

Then, again after hours condensed into minutes, "Why did you come to me when you saw me that night a few months ago?"

"Oh Len!" Her voice was like a bell that is cracked. "You are cruel."

"I know. Don't you see that I can't help myself? This is the reckoning, the final casting up of accounts."

"I loved you. Had come to love you. The thought of you had been the only thing which upheld me. The only thing which kept me from going to pieces, from turning wicked and profligate."

"You did not write."

"How could I? How could I? I wanted to meet you; but I could not call for help."

"You met me."

"It was all so different from what I had imagined. I had thought, should I ever meet you, I should ask you whether you still loved me or not. If you did, I was going to tell you all and to ask you whether you could forget and forgive. I knew you would say no. And then I was going to throw myself before a train or a street car. But you were ill.

Oh Len, even now I'd be willing to let things go on . . ."

"I know, I know," said the voice from the dark. "We could not. We are human." And, after a pause, "I am not through with you yet. I have another question. Let me speak for awhile. There is a thought that came to me when I left you a few days ago.

"One day, more than a year ago, I was myself in one of those houses. A man by name of Joseph had taken me there. I did not know there were such things in the world. There was a girl who came, thinking I was looking for that sort of thing. She wore a kimono and under it nothing but her undergarments, all of silk. She sat down by my side, letting the kimono fall open. And later she sat down on my knees . . ." The voice came painfully through the night. The invisible figure of the speaker had risen to its feet.

"And you?" Lydia asked in a mere thread of a voice. "Did you stay?"

"No!" A current seemed to flow through the darkness, conveying something of the struggle in the man. Then his voice broke out again, like a cry of distress. "Lydia . . . Did you ever . . . do the same?"

At that she threw herself down at his feet, grovelling in the sand, reaching for his knees, blindly and writhingly. Sobs convulsed her whole body. "Len! You are cruel, cruel!"

He raised his hands, clenched to heaven, and stepped back so that she fell forward. His voice was

hoarse as he cried through serried teeth. "Answer. Did you?"

"Len!" a wail; and another one, "I can't."

"Enough!" he cried, stepping back still farther.

Five minutes went by. Lydia lay on her face, sobbing soundlessly into her hands. Len stood, leaning against the rock behind and bending over in agony.

Then, once more, he stood over her, swaying. "That is not all yet. But before I go on, let me ask you this. We cannot live together; but we can die. Are you willing?"

Slowly she controlled her sobs as he waited for her answer. She sat up. When her voice came, it was indifferent; it had the sere sound of falling leaves. "What do you think I came here for? Death will be a relief."

"Then for the last," the voice said from above. "You must have liked the life you were leading. You went out again, at night, when I was ill!"

He sank down, exhausted.

But she had sprung up. She was pacing the beach, exclaiming in inarticulate sounds to the dark vault of heaven, waving her arms as though to fight off unspeakable misery.

He rose, profoundly shaken, as he saw her dim outline against the half luminous clouds. For the moment she was to him no more than a human being in the extremity of distress. He tried to touch her. She recoiled.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "This is more than I can bear! I . . . I . . . Oh, why does not light-

ning strike me? Oh . . . Oh!" And once more she became incoherent.

He followed her.

She veered and faced him in the dark. "Stand still! Don't come near me! I have something to say. But when it is said, I am going into the water. Don't hold me!"

He stood, transfixed by the quality of her voice; but he stood swaying.

Tonelessly she went on. "You were ill. There was no money. I . . ."

He was on her. He held her wrist. She struggled. He jerked her back as she made a last attempt to escape.

For a moment it was as if he were towering above her in the dark. Then he placed his hands on her shoulders; and her will vanished under his.

And, for the last time that night, his voice rang out into the darkly glimmering bay. "Lydia!" it said, "in the sight of the almighty God, you are my wife!"

Chapter VI

THE PLEADING

THE north-west wind had swept the sky; a small, driving shower during the night had been all it had brought of rain. As the wind freshened and grew into a gale, the sun rose in the east, clear and bright. By ten o'clock, the waters of the lake, so recently piled into the northern expanse, were on their march back into the southern basin, proceeding in huge waves which broke on the rocky promontories of the Narrows, splashing up into the air to a height of thirty and forty feet.

A violent and gurgling current raced through the deep and narrow channel, its direction reversed now. It was these currents that bared the rock of every vestige of newly-formed soil. Towards the south, the channel slowly contracted, with steep flanks, forcing the waves which rolled in from the north-west to rear and rise in height as they diminished in width. The gorge through which they rolled at the narrowest point made the impression of a rapid in a swift-flowing, treacherous stream, but on a vastly larger scale.

From the dome of a huge granite block, two human figures looked down on that chaos which glittered in greenish blue and gold, reflected and refracted from the sharp, trenchant eye of the sun. All

the waters seemed to be crowding south in glee for this tumble. Only between the two capes lay the slick of the bay, just ruffled by the fierce blast of the wind till, just inshore, below the limestone headland, it was mirror-smooth.

The two listened; all night they had been able to hear the dry rattling voices of those rock cymbals on the second cape. The wind was too boisterous now; what they heard was no more than its infuriated, sibilant whistling through the crannies of the rock and the aisles of the forest behind them.

In their attitude, as they stood there, hair and clothes fluttering in the wind, there was something new. Their arms were interlocked; their bodies nestled against each other; their eyes were soft.

Yesterday nobody would have taken them for anything but brother and sister; nobody would, today, have mistaken them for aught but man and wife.

Yet, as they gazed into the turmoil of the waters, there was in their eyes that which did not speak of the mere happiness of a union newly consummated. Beyond and behind the undeniable tenderness of their looks lay a certain wistfulness and expectancy.

Each seemed to wait for the other to say something; to utter, in one single word, a feeling or a change in feeling which would do away with something that stood, not between them, but behind them, towering over them, hovering over their heads.

Neither, perhaps, could have explained what it

was. As far as it could be expressed, their fate or doom seemed to have paled like a star before the dawn of the sun. Yet when, after awhile, they turned back from the sight spread at their feet, tears were trembling in the eyes of the woman.

They went along the south shore of the headland where the fury of the polished wind passed overhead and they were screened by the shaggy forest that covered the promontory.

They spent the greater part of the day on this, the lee side of the headland; partly because unexpectedly they had here come upon a last visual link with humankind; for on the opposite shore of this second bay of the Narrows stood the white log cabin of an Indian fisherman and trapper. About it, as it looked across to them, scarcely discernible for the distance, small figures moved. There, a common, every-day life was lived.

To them, life had become a dream, hardly understood.

At noon, they went berry-picking.

It was not till, after many hours of reclining in mossy hollows, protected from the wind, they noticed that the westering sun assumed the golden radiance of evening that they seemed to awake to another life.

Out of the dreamy and lazy day grew the fretful night.

Morning found them in their tent, her head resting on his breast; his arms clasped about her.

The wind had ceased. A hot summer day was well on its way.

When they had risen, Len took the hatchet he had brought and went into the bush to cut dry branches for their fire.

Lydia, alert as soon as he had gone, went down to the beach and slipped under the inverted boat. It was clear, she was counting the tins that held their provisions. A thought expressed the result of her investigation. "Six days at most! There is no chance of returning south!" Yet, as a last resort, there was the cabin of the Indian fisherman which they had seen in the throat of the fjord-like bay.

When Len returned, carrying an armful of brushwood, Lydia was back at the tent, preparing the kettle for tea. Her dark-blue eyes deepened with tenderness.

Close to the overhanging flank of the western granite rib, there was a bed of moss, deep, soft, and moist. Len carried a sheet of canvas over there and spread it out, throwing a blanket on top. Reclining on these, they spent the day half asleep, half awake; rising at such times only as demanded their work in the preparation of meals. Half asleep they were, in a common oblivion of self; half awake, in the lulling consciousness of mutual contact.

Three days went thus; their stores were dwindling.

On the fourth day they awoke to a yearning for activity. For the first time they separated. Len had brought two hooks and improvised a fishing tackle. Lydia took a pail and hunted for berries.

Simultaneously, the impulse had arisen in both: from the desire to stave off the final moment; or at

least, not to have it forced on them by sheer starvation.

Yet this separation itself was fatal: it gave both of them time to extricate themselves from the intoxication of contact and sense. When, a few hours later, they met again, they seemed for some time strange to each other; they spoke in order to conceal, not to reveal their thought. Neither, however, could hide from the other the purpose of that separation. Len had caught a pickerel and a gold-eye; Lydia had picked a quart of strawberries. They did not draw on their stores.

It was the same the next day and the day after that. At night, they spoke more frequently. Len recited poetry again; Lydia listened. A world outside themselves re-arose into existence.

One evening he recited himself into a state of spiritual exaltation which seemed to remove him far from her, into a different realm where she longed to follow without quite succeeding.

He paced the beach. From beyond the tall spires of the northern trees a full moon bathed the bay in front of their beach. Not a breath stirred.

"Art!" he said suddenly. "Literature! Two, three years ago my only aim was to know all that. Perhaps to dabble in it myself. It expresses what we feel. It makes our feelings conscious. It makes us articulate. There are many moods in me of which I should have remained unaware had I not read. There are perhaps a few moods which I might have expressed myself had I not been swamped by other things, by life, by . . ."

He stopped as if he had looked into an abyss.

"There is another sort of life which is life," he went on after a pause, pacing the sand. "The life of most men is no more than a mere existence. That other life is the life of my brother; straightforward, frank, God's life in its lowest terms. Yet God's life is full of beauty because it is simple and sincere. We thinkers are rebels all, offspring of Satan . . ."

The last few days had been life in its lowest terms! Before the eye of the listening woman a vision arose. "Len . . ."

He stopped. "Yes?"

"I don't know. Perhaps it is wrong of me to say it. I, too, have been thinking." Her voice sounded far away as if it came from the land of dreams incapable of fulfilment, of dreams still-born. It invested her words with a fulness of meaning as if they must overflow with what they could not express.

In Len's throat a lump seemed to swell. He went and sat by her side. At that she burst into tears. "Speak," he said softly.

"Oh Len!" she cried; and, half sobbing, half smiling, her head sinking to his knees, she went on, "What is poverty? Life . . . Life itself is sweet. A cabin in the bush. A single room. . . . Here on this beach! Work, work, work! The night together. Farming perhaps; or fishing. It takes so little . . ."

Very tenderly, but immensely sobered, Len took her head and lifted it to free himself. For a moment she hardly knew what was happening to her.

Again he was pacing the sand, a few yards away;

but this time a great turmoil lashed him to his very depths.

"Len!" she cried once more; for she realised that she had made impossible the very thing she had longed for, even an extension in time of what they possessed.

"I know," he said. "I know! Did you think I had not thought of that? Because I was thinking of it, I left you at Poplar Grove. Lydia, it is still time. I will take you back. Leave me to face it alone."

"Alone?"

He, as though crushed by the things enormous that were welling up in him, "Too late! Too late!"

"Len, we could go together."

His gesture was wild: that of the branches of a wind-tossed tree.

She raised herself into a sitting posture.

"No," he said tonelessly. "Lydia! We talked things over the other night. I meant to crush you, then. I was crushed myself. I don't want to blame you; I want to state facts. We are we. We cannot help ourselves. When we went out into the wilderness, I meant to kill you and then to kill myself. I found I could not. Thus we should have gone along, each by himself. We cannot live, but we can die together."

"Death?" she said and shivered. "Life is sweet . . . now."

"Lydia!"

"Yes?"

"Suppose we did what you suggest. I have thought of it myself. It cannot be done. One day,

when you are in my arms, I should suddenly see you, with my mind's eyes, as I saw that girl!"

Her voice was a cry in the night. Her head sank low.

"I should rush away and kill you, then. You would go alone. Our present union before God would be sullied."

She reached for his hand.

"Lydia," he cried, fighting his sobs. "I will vow to you if you agree. . . . This cannot go on. . . . That thing stands behind us and over us, always, ready to step between us. I do not blame you. But it is there. If one night I do not come to you, then you will know that the thing has arrived; that the spectre of the past has arisen and given the signal. That sign I will give you; it will be time, then, to make an end. And if you agree, we shall die together."

The woman drew herself up by his hand. A smile as of another world hovered on her lips. From her, too, sense had fallen like an embroidered cloak. Her spirit, awakened, stood by his side. Arm in arm, without words, they paced the beach for over an hour.

Chapter VII

THE END

THREE more days went by. The wind had veered to the south again; in the course of a day and a night the sky had clouded.

Len was restless. He put his fish-hooks out in the morning; but he soon left them, roaming alone over rocks and beaches and watching the lake. The water, under pressure of the wind, was rising in the northern basin.

He found a place whence he could see the limestone headland to the north; he looked at it for hours and hours, across the bay.

Lydia gathered berries or sat in the tent. A final resolve gave her very step a sort of solemnity.

Something was approaching. Lydia displayed herself to him. He responded by brutal caresses.

Her eyes seemed to turn inward. Once or twice, during the second day of the south wind, he had the uncanny impression as if he were fondling a corpse. She was reading the signs.

At night, that day, when they had been sitting together till late after dark, he suddenly pressed her against his body, crushing her breasts, and then thrust her from him.

She rose and went to the tent where she sat down and waited for hours.

About midnight, she emerged, went to the fire, renewed the fuel till it blazed up, and waited again.

The flames illumined the whole of their retreat. To east and west the glittering rocks sprang up, surmounted by a hood of coniferous trees. To the south, the inlet narrowed in an angle; there stood the tent. To the north, the beach lay open to the bay; sharp, lapping sounds proceeded from there.

As if looking for Len, she went all about the cove. Then she took a brand from the fire and threw it into the tent which flared up and was consumed in five minutes. She returned to the fire and sat down.

She listened to the wind which had sprung into the north. It was freshening, blowing stronger and stronger. From time to time she replenished the fire.

Still the wind was freshing. By three o'clock in the morning it was blowing a gale. It whistled and moaned; and the enormous spruce trees, outlined in black against the pale clouds scudding under the waning moon, began to sway and to toss their tops as if in wild gestures.

With the dawn, Len returned. The wind was so boisterous by that time that she had not heard him approach. She winced as he stepped into the sphere of light cast by the fire.

He looked about, saw the burnt tent, and nodded.

She rose; and together they went to the boat and turned it on to its keel. Underneath, a few tins were left. Len scattered them with a kick of his foot.

He put the oars into place and threw the blanket from the moss bed under the rock dyke on the floor of the craft. They pushed it into the water. The

short waves, refracted into the bay, hit its flanks with sharp, slapping sounds.

Len looked about, holding the rope. His eyes were hollow. Then he shrugged his shoulders and bent his look on Lydia. She, too, nodded, climbing in. A moment later he followed.

When the sun rose, dissolving the scudding clouds from the sky, they were in the bay; Len pulled straight across, into the lee of the limestone headland. When they came inshore, he followed its curves, sometimes running the boat into a "slip" between two dykes and resting for half an hour or longer.

It was past the noon hour when they reached the point. Here, the water was in a wild turmoil, backwater eddies being set up by the fierce current sweeping past the cape in stationary waves through which the water seemed to shoot as through a cataract.

A last time Len ran the boat into a slip; when they had landed, he pulled it half up on the rock ledge.

The clatter of the cymbals was fierce; yet, as the wind rose and fell, there was a wild music in it.

They went to the utmost point, looking out over the seething waste of water. The sky was deep-blue and clear; the wind, what the fishermen around the lake call a "roaring north-wester." The noise was deafening, what with the wind and the clattering stones which rolled and tilted all about, rapping the underlying terraces with their rims.

In front, the waves broke over the lower and

outer ledges, sending fountains of spray into the air where they splashed against the next higher cliff.

Len and Lydia came to a point where, in the almost continuous spray of the breaking waves, a rainbow played, springing up and falling, and springing up again. With the ghost of a smile they looked at each other.

Then they sat down within the shelter of a ledge, enfolding each other with their arms and nestling body against body. Thus they remained for two or three hours, while the wind seemed to blow with an ever increasing fury.

At last Len disengaged himself and rose to his feet. She followed his example; and their eyes met. Are you ready? his look seemed to ask. I am ready, hers seemed to reply.

They returned to the boat. Len glanced at the westering sun.

The boat being relaunched, Len entered first. In the space between the rear thwart and the stern he spread the blanket and over it, crosswise, laid the rope, doubling it, with a loop to the left and the two loose ends to the right.

Then he nodded to Lydia.

A moment later, with a few strokes of the oars, he headed the craft into the turmoil beyond the point of the cape. The boat leapt. When the current caught it, broadside on, it whirled about. He shipped the oars and beckoned to Lydia.

Side by side they lay down on the floor; and Len lashed their bodies together with the rope that had served as a painter.

Their lips met; his hands clasped her head; hers, his. Their eyes were closed. They drifted for hours.

At almost the precise moment when the sun touched the horizon in the west, they entered the gorge of the Narrows; but they did not know where they were; they never looked up.

The gorge is strewn with rocky reefs. The never-ceasing motion had hypnotised them into an ecstasy beyond that of a mere human union. But when, in a sudden downward swing, as they were topping a huge, standing wave, and with a drenching rain of spray, the keel struck, so that the boat shivered into a thousand fragments, every muscle of their bodies sprang into activity, clasping more closely, clinging more desperately to that which was not shivered like brittle glass.

It was a single blow; then the softness of a bed; then a brief struggle for breath; then infinite comfort, a feeling of sinking, sinking, a sudden subsiding; and then . . . the end.

In a large, unpainted frame house a young woman was lying on a white bed, wrestling with an enormity within her, yelling with the pain of giving birth. An older woman, short, fat, grey, dispirited-looking, acted as midwife.

In the kitchen, below, a mere boy was pacing up and down, groaning, "My God! My God!"

Outside, in the yard, a giant was carrying a huge forkful of hay to the stable when, behind him, he suddenly heard the crunching of the wheels of a buggy and turned.

"This the Sterner place?" a broad Scotsman asked, holding the lines of his brisk, rangy team of drivers.

"Yes."

"Are you Mr. Sterner?"

"My name's Kolm. I am the stepfather of the Sterner boys."

"I came over from Hnafur. There were two corpses washed ashore, lashed together. Landed on a sand-spit. A man and a woman. The man carried a card in his pocket, with the name and the section number of this place. There's a pencilled direction that his share of the farm is to go to his brother. We want someone to identify the body."

"I'll come," Kolm said. "Wait a minute. Don't go to the house. They needn't know just yet."

When, a week later, the new-born child was christened, he was given the name of Leonard, in commemoration of one who was dead and as a promise, perhaps, that he should have the opportunities which his older namesake had lacked.

EXPLANATION OF LOCALISMS USED IN THE TEXT.

1) Correction Line.—In the survey of western Canada, north-south lines are laid out straight, that is, at a uniform distance from each other; since, however, meridians approach each other toward the pole, the survey lines would deviate from these meridians more and more the farther north they reach; this is corrected every twenty-four miles; the north-south line is moved over to east or west, as the case may be. An east-west road at this point, has, therefore, no continuous cross-roads. It is called a correction line.

2) To Prove up.—A free grant of land, under the Dominion Lands Act, became the property of the settler only when he had proved that he had complied with the requirements of the law, in other words, when he had "proved up."

3) Slough.—Any depression in the otherwise flat soil, often swampy or filled with water; or merely overgrown with long grass.

4) Slick—The smooth water in the lee of a windbreak when open water is ruffled.

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